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MARCH 2005

# neatoday

# Weighty Matters

**Obesity rates among today's youth have soared to crisis levels, and the impact is being felt in classrooms across the country. Can educators help turn the tide?**

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**IFS A097593 Ed. 10/04**

**TRNT0305**

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## Growing Pains

America's kids are expanding—and they're carrying more than just a little baby fat. Some 18 million are officially overweight or obese, and the numbers are growing so fast that some health experts are calling it a national crisis. Can educators do anything to reverse the tide? Many already are, with school-based health programs and nutrition policies that are sparking the imagination—and making a difference.

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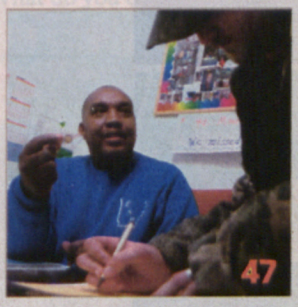


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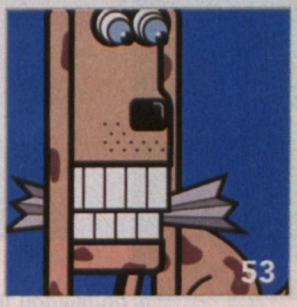


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# Taking Care

It's inching toward spring, and if my school day memories serve me, many of you aren't exactly doing a jig. Seven intense months of school can knock the wind out of the heartiest among us. Grueling tests, struggling kids, worried moms, dwindling budgets—it's enough to make you dive for the comfort food, aka a big plate of mac and cheese. And to be sure, many of us do. Mac and cheese and more. ¶ Now I'm no scrooge when it comes to the indulgence-as-escape, double fudge queen that I am. But here's the question: What do you do when the stresses of the day continue to mount, when the hours refuse to get longer? Do you have a healthy plan for taking care of you? ¶ We spend a good chunk of this issue of *NEA Today* looking at the crisis in health among America's children—your students. Increasing numbers are battling obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes—at 8, 10, 14 years old. It's a sad, sad story with repercussions that spill into your classrooms every day. And while we were buoyed by the discovery of so many educators working furiously to reverse the epidemic, for us the question remained: What about you? ¶ Fact is, many of you have left yourselves out of the get-healthy equation. You say, "Kids first, me next," but somehow your turn in line never comes. And the results, as for so many other adults in this country, are as disturbing as for our youth: An estimated 65 percent are either obese or overweight, putting a majority of the adult population at high risk for a host of killer diseases. ¶ Spring, then, may be just the time to begin considering something new for yourself beyond a spruced-up house (although your ESP colleagues serve up some very cool advice about that on page 40). ¶ How about a healthier way? Walk with a buddy every day. Breathe to five when you're miffed. Eat all the apples you're given. Laugh. ¶ Here at *NEA Today*, we'll try to do the same, so share your inspiration. Let us know what you're doing and how it's going. All of us, our kids included, could use a boost knowing that with spring, the love affair with ourselves has begun.

Marilyn Milloy

EDITOR MARILYN MILLOY

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| Taxes (assuming 25%)** | $238 | $250 |
| Take-Home Pay | $712 | $750 |
| After-Tax Savings Account Contribution | $0 | $50 |
| Biweekly Net Income | $712 | $700 |

*Contributions to a tax-deferred account are taxed when withdrawn. Withdrawals from a tax-deferred account prior to age 59 may be subject to a 10% Internal Revenue Code (IRC) penalty tax. (The IRS penalty tax does not apply to withdrawals from 457 plan accounts.) Conversely, earnings from an investment that does not offer tax-deferral are taxed currently, and withdrawals are not subject to a penalty tax.

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*Great Public Schools for Every Child*

# Parents and Educators Team Up

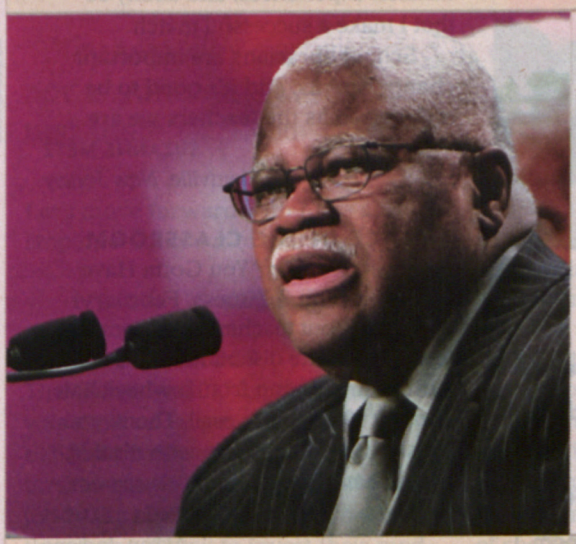
'Parents and teachers are in the same difficult situation together, besieged by outside experts pointing out what we are supposedly doing wrong.'

—DOROTHY RICH, HOME AND SCHOOL INSTITUTE

As a veteran classroom teacher, I learned some hard-earned lessons. But none was more important than this: The better I got to know a student's parents, the better a teacher I became.

A child's education begins at home, not in the classroom, and certainly the home's powerful influence does not end when school begins. It is a force to be reckoned with, for good or ill, throughout a youngster's school career.

Every parent I've ever known wants his or her child to succeed—in school and in life. No parent has ever said to me, "Reg, I want my kid to fail." Just as no educator ever gets up in the morning and says: "I want my students to fail today." Parents and educators want the same thing: Our children and students to succeed. And when they do, both parents and educators alike are filled with pride.



"Parental involvement ranks right up there with smaller class sizes and improved student discipline at the top of our members' professional wish list."

—REG WEAVER

Almost all parents today understand the importance of their child getting a good education, and it doesn't matter if the parents are highly educated or not. After all, the parents can see for themselves that the factory down the street—where a relatively uneducated young person once could go, land a well-paying union job, and work a lifetime—is closed. There's a padlock on the front gate, and those jobs are long gone.

Parents get it. But what many parents don't always get is how they can help their child succeed in school. And that's where we—Team NEA—come in. We can help. Which is why, since I have been President, NEA has stepped up its parental outreach efforts.

Working more closely than ever with the National PTA and grassroots organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League, La Raza, and ACORN, we have prepared and distributed parent guides to school success, improving student achievement, reading, and math—in both English and Spanish. We've helped minority parents organize themselves into public school support groups. And we've transformed NEA's Read Across America from a one day event that celebrates Dr. Seuss's birthday and reading into a year-round program.

What's more, in partnership with the Home and School Institute's MegaSkills Education Center, NEA is training NEA local leaders and activists to become more effective parental involvement activists in their schools and districts.

Ask NEA members what they want, and they'll tell you: More parental involvement. Yes, parental involvement ranks right up there with smaller class sizes and improved student discipline at the top of our members' professional wish list.

But wishing for more parental involvement won't make it happen. Teachers and education support professionals must make it happen.

We need to connect with parents so they can see that we, like them, are dedicated to their children succeeding. And I think the message we, as educators, want to deliver to parents is that we can't replace you, we can't do it for you, but together, we can make a huge difference for your child.

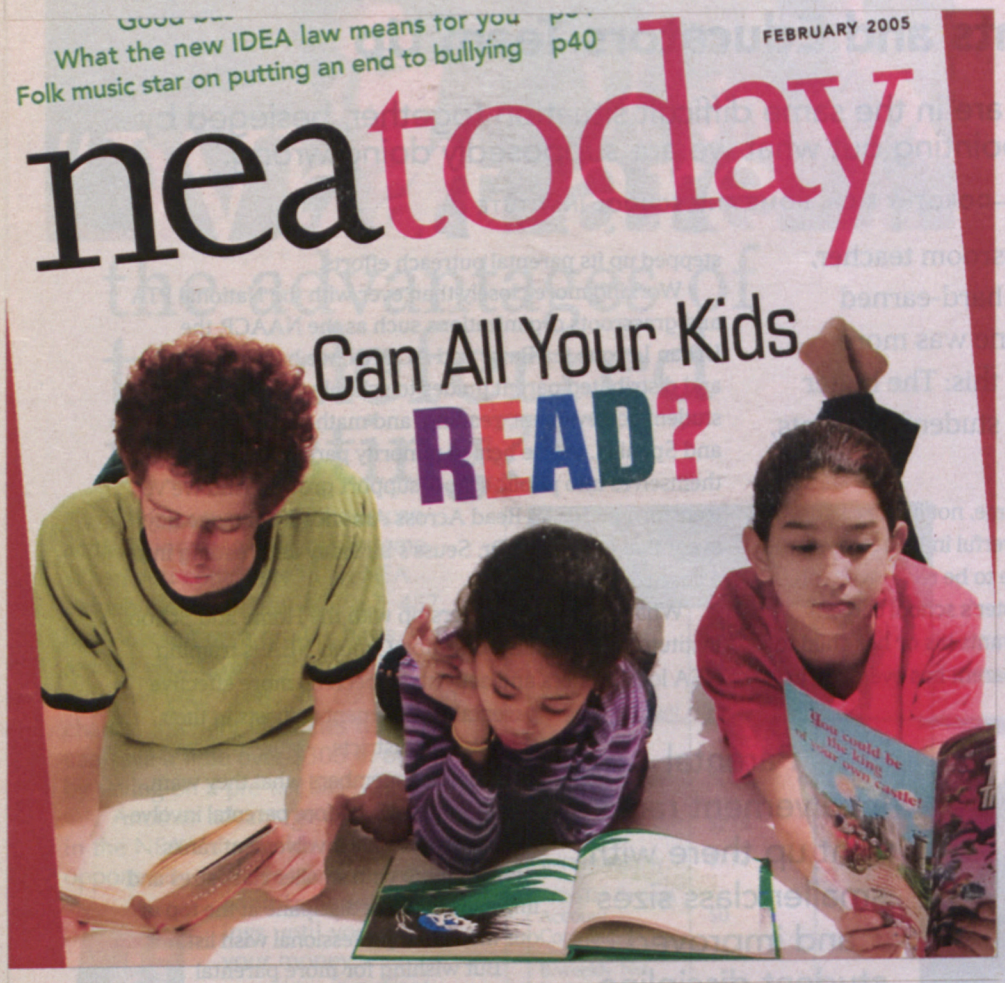
In a recent radio broadcast to parents, I said: "If someone in your family is sick, you visit a doctor....If someone is in trouble, you consult a lawyer....And if you want your children to be successful, maybe it's time to visit their school."

Team NEA, we are serious about parental involvement. We're doing more than talking the talk, we're walking the walk. And I invite each and every one of you to join us on this walk. It's all about shared responsibility. We can't do it alone, and neither can the parents. But working together, watch out America! We'll educate the students and create a great public school for every child.

Reg Weaver

NEA PRESIDENT REG WEAVER

PHOTO: MATT FERGUSON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FEBRUARY 2005
neatoday
Can All Your Kids
READ?

## REACHING RELUCTANT READERS

When I saw your February magazine, I was excited to see it focused on reading ("Can All Your Kids Read?"). When I started thumbing through the stories, I was even more excited to see the article on comic books for adolescent readers. I'm a sixth-grade language, reading, and social studies teacher, and I absolutely believe that comic books have a place in the classroom. I have students who didn't want to read anything for pleasure. Then I invested in several comic books (after attending a reading workshop), and now they fight over reading them! I've also started branching off into Japanese manga and other graphic novels. Using classics that have been turned into graphic novels is a great way to expose reluctant readers to the classics. I also order kids' editions of several magazines, like *National Geographic* and *Sports Illustrated*, and those are really popular with my students.

By far the most exciting thing I have noticed, however, is that the same students who wouldn't read anything for pleasure have now ventured out to other books in the classroom library. They've started to develop a love of reading. Let's face it—as adults, we read what we enjoy. Getting students to enjoy reading is half the battle!

LEE ANN HOFFMANN
*Nashville, Tennessee*

I want to thank you for including school librarians in your recent issue on reading ("Can All Your Kids Read?" February). All too often educators forget the important contribution that school librarians make to literacy attainment. According to recent studies, the extent to which books are borrowed from school libraries with certified school librarians shows a strong relationship with reading achievement.

DEBRA GNIEWEK
*Newtown, Pennsylvania*

As a middle school librarian I constantly monitor print material for its content and age-appropriateness when helping my students select a book or gather electronic information.

When students come in to select a book, I spend a great deal of time trying to ascertain their likes and dislikes, experiences, and ability so that I make a successful match.

School librarians are important change agents, and it's good to be recognized as the teachers we are.

SUZANNE METZ
*Montville, New Jersey*

## A PLACE IN THE CLASSROOM

I enjoyed reading "You Gotta Have Heart" (Health & Fitness, February) that told about teachers who continue to teach despite disabilities. This is my 11th year teaching from a wheelchair and my 19th year overall. Thank you for showing that people with disabilities do have a place in the classroom.

WAYNE L. LANDIS
*Akron, Indiana*

## THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC

Thank you for the February article by Anna Antonucci ("Sing Out," Last Bell) on the benefits of singing in the classroom. I was a student at Sunny Brae Avenue Elementary School in the San Fernando Valley as a child in the 1960s and vividly remember singing the songs that Antonucci lists while Mrs. Weisman strummed her autoharp. Antonucci is correct about the joy and the release that singing gave us from the daily work in that fifth-grade classroom. I can sing most of the lyrics 37 years later and am grateful for the beauty of the music that remains in my heart. Today, I play classical music

in my high school English classroom, and I believe that its beauty, too, will remain with my students.

JOAN SWENSON
*Bakersfield, California*

### POLITICAL DIVERSITY

Lisa Disbrow (Letters, February) asked NEA to respect members who are Republicans. Under the Republicans, at the state and federal levels, education and teachers have been bashed around. Under the Democrats, teachers have not really fared much better.

When is the NEA going to support in words and money candidates and parties that really support the ideals of the NEA? Continuing to feed the Democrats and Republicans has gotten us nowhere over the last 25 years.

It is time to get behind candidates and parties that are really for us.

Let's move forward with hope and stop operating out of fear.

STEPHEN HUGHES
*Carlisle, Pennsylvania*

### RIGHT ON TARGET

The "Pensions 101" article (January) was right on target. Having a defined-benefit plan allows (educators) to concentrate on doing the best job in the classroom without having the worry of how to invest their modest retirement contributions.

Educators accept relatively lower pay than is expected for people with similar academic backgrounds and talents. One reason for the lower salaries is the promise of getting the guaranteed retirement benefit that a defined-benefit plan offers. Low-paid employees often find themselves on public welfare in their declining years—a condition that is not likely with a guaranteed retirement benefit.

ROGER REA
*Omaha, Nebraska*

### DRUG TESTS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Both Debate columns in the January issue miss the single largest point: Why test kids participating in extracurricular activities but not anyone else? It is my experience that this group of kids is the most likely to be "clean."

Ms. Dunn's point about bringing up test scores is silly. We would, at best, raise the test scores of a small segment of the student body. Mr. King also misses the point when he says drug use is a fact of life, seemingly saying there is only so much we can do. We do not have to accept that illicit drug use is part of high school. If we're going to test kids, test them all.

JOHN HAVLICEK
*La Crosse, Wisconsin*

### GIRLS NEED HELP TOO

I read with interest "Why Wait?" (Last Bell, January) about giving kids academic and behavioral assistance as soon as possible instead of navigating the current bureaucracy. I was disappointed that Ms. Thompson-Kelly only singled out boys in her classroom that needed extra attention to stay on track academically. She talked about the difficulties Harry, Peter, and Walter faced but made no mention of "Brittany" or "Katie."

It is the sad truth that girls often languish in our classrooms while their more aggressive, attention-seeking male counterparts receive the majority of special assistance. We need to make a commitment to aid all struggling students.

JOANNA KAHN
*Anaheim, California*

> **"Why test kids participating in extracurricular activities but not anyone else?...If we're going to test kids [for drugs], test them all."** —JOHN HAVLICEK

## LET'S TALK

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# upfront

Trends
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Humor

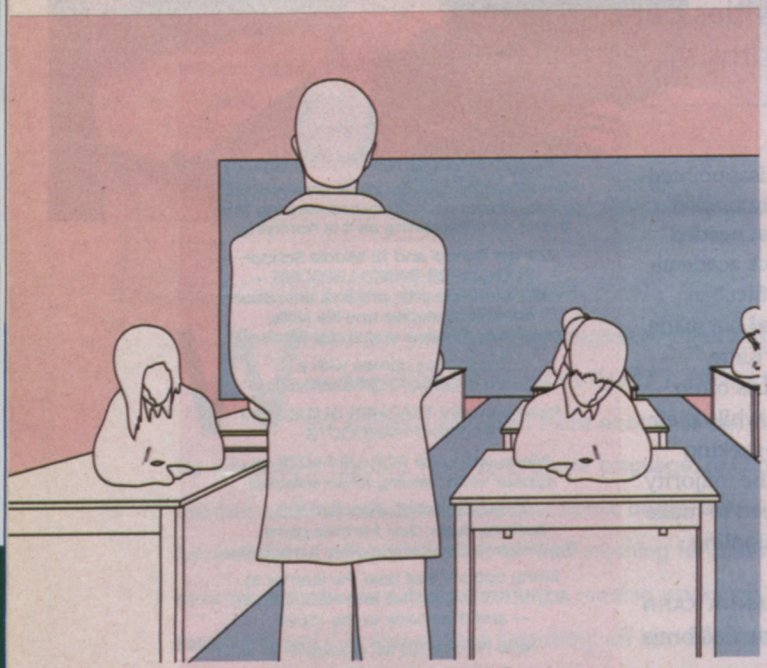
## High School Help

**President Bush has put improving high schools at the center of the education agenda for his second term—and that's great. But what's his strategy? More testing.**

**THIS, DESPITE THE GROWING CONSENSUS** among both educators and parents that public schools are already spending too much time and energy testing and retesting students.

The so-called No Child Left Behind law (NCLB) requires testing every year in grades 3 through 8, plus once between grades 10 and 12. President Bush proposes to add two more years of testing: Every child would be tested every year between grades 3 and 11.

Most educators don't think that's the path to higher achievement. Here's a summary of NEA's plan to boost learning in America's high schools:



> **COURSEWORK** that is relevant to students' futures in higher education and the workforce
> Aggressive **DROPOUT PREVENTION** programs
> Strong **SCHOOL RE-ENTRY** efforts focused on the individual needs of students
> **SMALLER SCHOOLS** and learning communities
> **ACCOUNTABILITY** systems that include both high academic standards and low dropout rates as a measure of school success
> And federal **FUNDS** to help pay for all this.

NEA is not alone. Some 45 groups have joined in an alliance to fix NCLB, including leading civil rights, religious, parents', and educators' organizations. There's a rising, bipartisan chorus of state legislatures and members of Congress calling for many of the same changes.

Go to **www.nea.org/neatodayextra** for more.

## Hitting the Books

High school students are spending more time on core academic subjects, earning **9 PERCENT MORE** credits in these subjects than in 1990, and **25 PERCENT MORE** than in 1982. And more students are taking—and passing—Advanced Placement exams: 21 percent of the class of 2004 took AP tests, with 13 percent passing. In the class of 2000, 16 percent took AP tests and 10 percent passed.

ILLUSTRATION TOP: ROSS TROWER; PHOTO BOTTOM: CORBIS

# Smarties Get Hitched

## You know that student who takes out her compact mirror and face powder during your class discussions?

**RECENT NEWS** from Grand Valley State University in Michigan may convince her to work on her homework instead of her highlights for reasons that appeal specifically to the high school hormone bundle: getting smart gets the guys!

In an analysis of 22 years' worth of engagement announcements, students in Sonia Dalmia's gender and economics class found that wives have become more likely to have more education than their husbands.

In 1980, brides-to-be, on average, had fewer years of schooling; but in 2002, more smart girls were getting hitched.

As the days of households headed by a single breadwinner have faded into the past, a potential spouse's education and earnings potential have become more attractive, says Dalmia, an economics professor.

Moreover, America continues to transform from a manufacturing giant into a service-based economy, which means "brain power is more required than physical power and clearly women are equally equipped, if not better, than men," Dalmia adds.

# Seeing Red?

If your red pen makes your students squirm, they may no longer have reason to fear. Although red has been the preferred shade for corrections since the 1700s, when clerks and accountants dipped quills into red ink to fix ledgers, the trend in correction color may be changing: Purple may be the new red. Sharon Carlson, a health and education teacher in Northampton, Massachusetts, switched a few years ago. "Purple stands out, but it's not as scary as red," she explains. Pen manufacturers have taken the hint and increased distribution of the friendlier purple pens. This year, Paper Mate raised production of purple pens by an estimated 10 percent.

According to color psychologists, purple mixes the authority of red with the serenity of blue, making it a better color for constructive corrections. Students may view purple advice more positively. Says Carlson, "Red is danger; purple is gentler."

—SARAH RABOVSKY

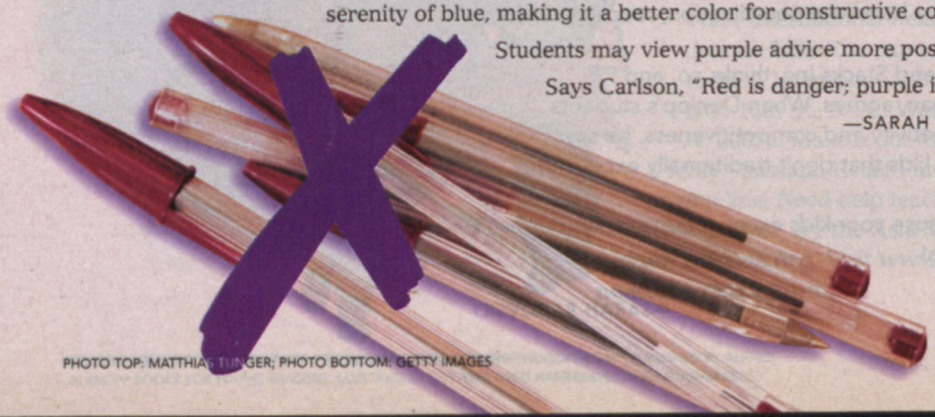


PHOTO TOP: MATTHIAS TUNGER; PHOTO BOTTOM: GETTY IMAGES

# Notepad

## Funding Gap Grows

To those who have, more is given. That's what the Education Trust found in a recent school funding study. On average, districts that have the highest numbers of low-income and minority students get less state and local money than the richest, whitest districts.

Nationwide, the gap was nearly $900 per student for low-income districts, $800 for high-minority districts.

And the gaps are growing.

The study looked at the percentage of students living below the poverty line in each district and compared per-pupil funding in the top 25 percent of districts statewide with districts in the bottom quarter. It also compared the top and bottom districts in percentage of minority children.

In 25 states, the highest poverty districts received less state and local money than the lowest poverty districts. And in 31 states, the highest minority districts got less money.

The report also notes that low-income students cost more to educate, so low-income districts should get more money, not less.

Since 1997, the poverty gap has gotten larger. But the study noted some shining exceptions. Read more at www2.edtrust.org/edtrust (see "Reports and Publications").

### Have a great idea?

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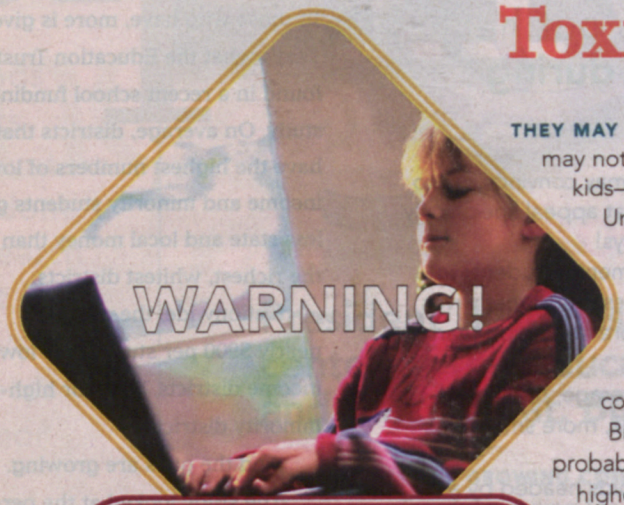
# Toxic Computers?




This computer may be harmful to your child's learning.

**THEY MAY BE STANDARD FARE** in homes and schools, but computers may not be helping students learn. In fact, they could be hurting kids—or so concludes a sophisticated study by researchers at the University of Munich in Germany.

Thomas Fuchs and Ludger Woessmann used a major math and reading survey called the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), involving 15-year-olds from 32 countries. At first blush, PISA seemed to show that computers at home help: Students from homes with computers scored higher than those who were computerless.

But the researchers reasoned that families with computers were probably better off in many ways, and that could account for the higher scores. So they used statistical techniques to show the effect of computers on achievement when income and other family characteristics are equal. The result: Students with computers at home scored lower than comparable students without computers. Fuchs and Woessmann think the damage may be done by computer games. Among students who had computers, those with Internet access and e-mail did better than those without, perhaps because they spent more time on educational pursuits.

How about computer use in school? Controlling for other school and family characteristics, computers seemed to make little difference. Occasional users did slightly better than non-users, but frequent users did worse than either non-users or occasional users.

So, are computers harmful? Probably not. But you need to take care how, and how much, little Johnny uses them.

# Get a CUP and...Go!

If you think stacking cups means putting away the dishes, you have some catching up to do. Although it may sound more like a chore, this fast-paced game has been growing wildly popular among students of all ages, with an estimated 7,500 cup-stacking programs worldwide.

**THE CHALLENGE** involves moving a dozen small cups—similar to everyday tumblers—into numerous pre-determined stacks and sequences, and doing it as speedily as possible. More and more, physical education teachers across the country are using cup-stacking to improve hand-eye coordination, reaction time, ambidexterity, and focus.

But is it a sport? Industry pioneer Speed Stacks Inc. thinks so, and P.E. teacher John Dunlop of Portage, Michigan, agrees. When Dunlop's students get stacking, it really brings out their creativity and competitiveness, he says. Cup-stacking also "offers something for kids that don't traditionally excel in P.E.," Dunlop adds.

Still, don't try this at home. Just because your kids excel at cup-stacking doesn't mean they should practice on your china!

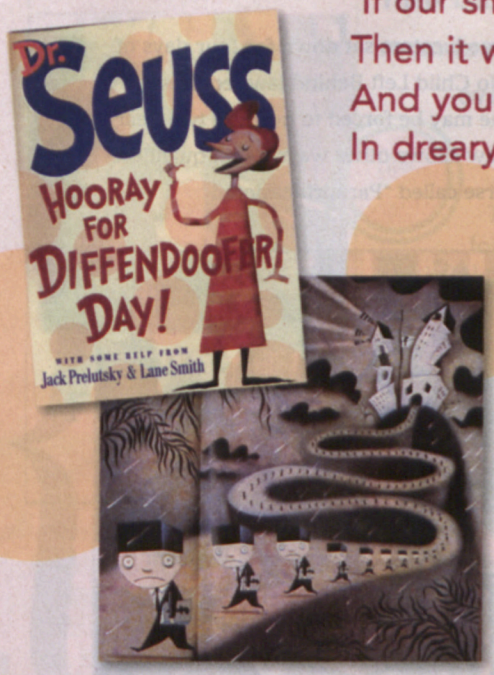
—SARAH RABOVSKY



PHOTO TOP: GERARD LAUNET; PHOTO BOTTOM: STEPHEN WISBAUER

# Seuss-inspired Prophecy?

'If our small school does not do well,
Then it will be torn down,
And you will have to go to school
In dreary Flobbertown.'

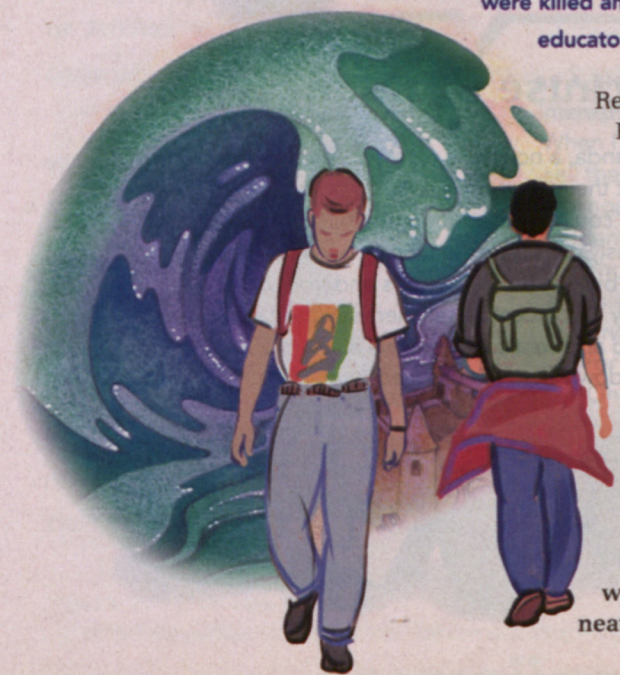



**HOORAY FOR DIFFENDOOFER DAY!**—a Dr. Seuss-inspired story—tells about an unorthodox school with eccentric teachers and oddball lessons. Suddenly, the outside world intrudes: If students can't pass a special test, the school will close. Sound like today? We think so, but the book was published in 1998, more than two years before the No Child Left Behind law passed. The book was originally sketched out by Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss), and completed by Jack Prelutsky and Lane Smith after Geisel died in 1991. More at **www.seussville.com/titles/diffendoofer/**.

—MIKE TUCKER

# Teachers and the Tsunamis

**Educators are still reeling from the horrific waves that killed hundreds of thousands of people last December. Just in Indonesia, over 2,300 educators and 45,000 children were killed and hundreds of schools destroyed, say educators' unions along the Indian Ocean coast.**



Restoring education will be expensive. Education International, the world federation of unions to which NEA belongs, is raising money for educators who were hurt. "This is a way we can help our colleagues put their lives together and get their schools up and running," says NEA International Relations head Joanne Eide. You can send a check to NEA International Relations, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Make it out to NEA and write "Tsunami Relief Fund" on the memo line. Need help teaching about the tsunamis? Try the Asia Society at **www.askasia.org**. Visit **www.nea.org/neatodayextra** for more.

# Global Takes

## Staying Home

They're not coming to America anymore—high school exchange students, that is. The number of exchange students is falling, says the Associated Press. Some 62,000 studied here in 1993–94 in programs accredited by the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel. But the number fell to 45,000 in 1999–00 and 28,000 last year. Why? A combination of schools' reluctance to shoulder the expense of extra students, and growing time pressures on American families—it's getting harder to find hosts.

## Save Money, Learn Less

Mexico is using television to teach more students cheaply. The *Christian Science Monitor* reports one in five middle school students is now in a "telesecondary," a bare bones building where students watch televised lessons in six subjects, 15-minutes each. Then they review for half an hour in workbooks, helped by classroom assistants. The program is growing fast—it costs half as much as traditional, face-to-face teacher instruction. There's only one problem—Mexican education officials concede that students in these schools don't learn nearly as much. But, they argue, telesecondaries provide some education in rural areas where there isn't any at all.

## Have a good story?

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AT TOP: ILLUSTRATION © LANE SMITH 1998 FROM "HOORAY FOR DIFFENDOOFER DAY" PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS. ILLUSTRATION BOTTOM: GREG HARGREAVES AND LEVAN/BARBEE

# Paras PASS

The tension in the room was palpable as nearly 50 Montana paraeducators sat down for four days of rigorous training capped by a high-stakes test. The so-called No Child Left Behind law requires all Title I instructional paras to be "highly qualified" by 2006. Some may be forced to go get a two-year college associate's degree—with no guarantee of a pay raise. But the law allows other ways to get qualified. In Montana, the MEA-MFT (a joint NEA-AFT affiliate) designed a course called "Paraprofessional Achieving Standards Successfully" ("Para PASS"), and got several Montana districts to agree that if you pass the PASS, you're highly qualified.

**IN BILLINGS,** the school district paid paras for two of the four days of the course. The paras learned practical strategies for teaching reading, writing, and math. It was all about how to work better with children. Said Billings para Gayle Bauer, "You know it's effective when you can say at the end, 'I can go do this!'"

MEA-MFT is continuing to offer the course to paras around the state and the pass rate so far is 93 percent. For more, contact Erik Burke, **eburke@mea-mft.org**.

# A Few Bad Apples

## Is your teaching effectiveness hobbled by a few persistent troublemakers?

## Ever thought of quitting because of them?

**IF SO,** you've got a lot of company, according to Public Agenda, a nonprofit research organization, which polled public secondary school teachers and parents to get their views on discipline problems and what to do about them. Three-quarters of the teachers say they "could be teaching a lot more effectively" if it were not for discipline problems, and one-third have "seriously considered quitting" because of them.

Parents who don't discipline their children get most of the blame—from teachers and from other parents. But school officials and lawyers also get some criticism. Nearly 80 percent of teachers say their schools have persistent troublemakers who already should have been removed and sent to alternative schools. Fifty-five percent believe a fear of lawsuits causes many administrators to back down when challenged by parents.

It's not surprising then that 94 percent of teachers think holding parents more accountable for their kids' behavior would keep more problem pupils in line.

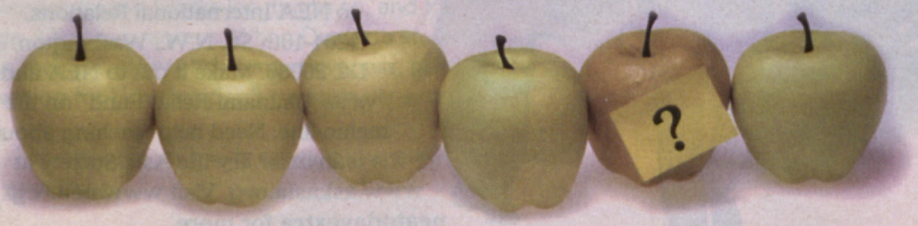




PHOTO TOP: ERIK BURKE/MEA-MFT; PHOTO BOTTOM: THINKSTOCK

# Surviving That First Year

**Think back to the first time you walked into a classroom as a new teacher. Chances are you felt a little overwhelmed—and under-prepared.**

If so, you'll identify with Donna Moffett, the subject of *Ms. Moffett's First Year: Becoming a Teacher in America* (PublicAffairs, 2004), whose foibles, missteps—and occasional morale-saving breakthroughs—are expertly chronicled by *New York Times* reporter Abby Goodnough.

Moffett is one of 323 provisional teachers hired in 2000 as the "New York City Teaching Fellows" and sent to some of the city's toughest schools. Answering a call for "talented professionals" willing to dedicate themselves to teaching the poorest children, Moffett and her peers receive a mere four weeks of training before getting the keys to their own classrooms that September.

Inevitably, Moffett, who lands as a first-grade teacher at P.S. 92 in Brooklyn, learns as many lessons as her charges that year. At first bewildered by her students' diverse learning needs—in fact, their sheer neediness—Moffett soldiers on, combating parental apathy and bureaucratic inertia as she gamely tries to tie together a few successful lessons, a few successful days in a row.

To Moffett's credit, she guts it out and, Goodnough adds in an epilogue, still teaches at P.S. 92. By 2003, half of the original fellows, though, had quit, signaling the dire need for more sustained preservice training and ongoing support for new teachers.

## 'SURE, I REMEMBER HER!'

**AS A BIOLOGY TEACHER,** I have a lab full of interesting animals from chinchillas to degus. When I have too many guinea pigs, I often sell them to students or their younger siblings. This year, a younger grade school student kept asking for a picture of me to take home. I was flattered that I had such an insistent fan. On the day I remembered to bring one in, I asked him what his plan was for my picture.

"Oh, Mrs. Gray," he said happily, "I've had my guinea pig George for three years now. He used to be one of yours. I want to show him your picture and see if he remembers you!"

—LOIS MITTINO GRAY
*New Harmony School, New Harmony, Indiana*

## Two-Minute Tips

### Classroom Secretary

As a middle school teacher, I try to get my students to take on leadership positions in class. One way to do this, and keep accurate records of class activities, is to assign a student to be class secretary for the week. That student takes notes in our class notebook, writes down homework assignments, records pages we read in class, and helps students who are returning from an absence.

This has cut down on the questions I get from absent students, because I have a running record of what transpired during a lesson and what goals we met. New students also transition easily into our procedures because they have a weekly buddy to help them catch the classroom flow.

Because I teach five classes of the same subject, the class notebook also helps me see what I've covered in each class. Students earn extra credit for being the secretary. They look forward to being my co-teacher for a week.

—MELLANAY AUMAN
*Tucson, Arizona*

### Clean Desks

To remove ink from desks, try using hairspray. It works wonders! Just spray the ink and wipe it away immediately.

—AIMEE MELILLO
*Brick, New Jersey*

**Have a good tip?**

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# Hey Teachers—Get Certified!

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Scholarships will be made through Historically Black Colleges and Universities in selected areas throughout the United States. If you are interested in participating in this program, please go to **www.nea.org/joyner** and fill out the attached short questionnaire, and we will determine your eligibility and an appropriate local HBCU for you to work through.

**www.nea.org/joyner**

# Reaching Out—and Getting Somewhere

## Improving public schools means involving the community, one project at a time.

A crowd of angry townspeople (Snookles) approaches several individuals (Snickels) who are down on their knees. They scream at the Snickels, dump food on their heads, and keep pushing them down when the Snickels try to stand up. But eventually the Snickels rise up together and....

What's going on here? This scene—with Seuss-like Snickel and Snookle characters—comes from a play about race relations co-sponsored by the Seattle Education Association. *The First Day*—written and produced by NEA member Donte Felder—takes a powerful and emotional look at the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* court decision in a most unusual way.

Taking on a tough issue like racism may not sound like the safest way to win friends and build support for public education. But in Seattle, the play has become a potent outreach tool local Association leaders are using to bridge the gap between school and community. Not only is it showcasing the talent of students at Orca School, the alternative elementary where Felder teaches, but it is also drawing school staff and parents and community members into the various schools where the play is being performed—and into discussions about race relations in the community.

**"SCHOOL STAFF ARE like construction workers, and their bridge-building work is essential to our success—and the success of the children we teach."**

—NEA PRESIDENT REG WEAVER

It's the kind of community outreach effort NEA President Reg Weaver contends is essential if educators expect to be successful. Creating quality education for all kids is a noble goal, he notes, "but the job is too big for us to do alone." And so across the country, state and local Associations have been on a mission to help educators reach beyond the school doors, developing a host of innovative partnerships, from the modest to the grand.

The California Teachers Association has been working, for example, with Preschool California, an advocacy campaign developed by Rob Reiner and funded by the Packard Foundation to develop a voluntary, quality preschool system for all 4-year-olds in the state.

The Illinois Education Association, in partnership with the state's Terrorism Task Force, has created an NEA-funded program to train educators and others involved in responding to all types of school emergency situations. The training has brought together school officials, police, fire, public health workers, emergency management teams and other first responders, and plans are in the works to expand the effort. In Utah, the state Association has developed a business partnership board made up of corporate officers, managers, and sales and marketing directors. It supports Utah Education Association programs that aim to improve student literacy and self-esteem, enhance technology, and help at-risk youth.

Students at Seattle's Orca School enact a provocative scene from *The First Day*, a play that has sparked valuable discussions about race relations.

And nationally, NEA is nurturing a slew of partnerships with businesses and organizations of every stripe—Saturn-UAW to promote effective teacher mentoring programs; Staples on its "Recycle for Education" program; and WGBH Education Foundation on early science literacy. The organization also has ties to Ford's Theater on arts programming, and is working with Black and Hispanic legislators on a project to close gaps in achievement. Recently NEA joined forces with the Tom Joyner Foundation to aid unlicensed minority teachers in completing their certification requirements.

They're all wildly different initiatives, but that's okay, says Weaver. What's notable is all the hard work educators are putting into developing these community relationships. Without such efforts, he notes, schools and kids can't achieve their best. "School staff are like construction workers," he says, "and their bridge-building work is essential to our success—and the success of the children we teach."

In Seattle, NEA leaders are the first to agree. SEA President Wendy Kimball says *The First Day* play is sparking reflection and conversation on racial issues, not only by students, but also by parents and school staff and the broader community. Connections are being made, she says. Kids are thinking deeply. "It's helping them achieve." And that, she says, is the best reward yet.

—NANCY KOCHUK

PHOTOS: DALE FOLKERTS

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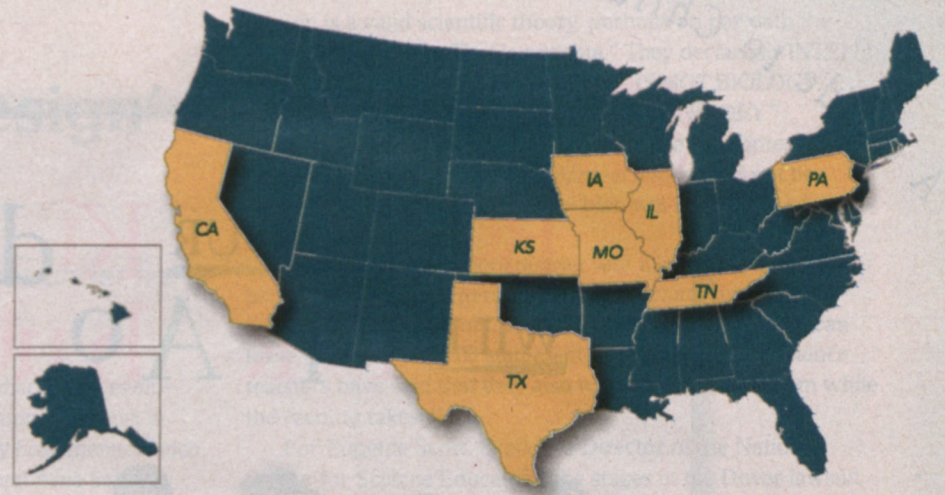



## No Time for Distractions

**CALIFORNIA** Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's agenda for 2005 includes merit pay for teachers, the repeal of minimum school funding guarantees passed by voters in 1988, and a defined-contribution retirement plan for new hires—shifting investment risk to them and ending *guaranteed* benefits.

That's hardly a cure for the Golden State Blues. A recent RAND Corporation report (www.rand.org) concludes that California's schools are underfunded, its class sizes too large, and its teacher salaries too low—32nd in the nation when adjusted for inflation.

Worse yet, the governor's plan adds more education mandates "without any commitment to stable and adequate funding," says **California Teachers Association** President Barbara E. Kerr. "This is a deliberate attempt to distract attention from the real problems that confront California's public schools."

## The Ruling: More Money

**KANSAS** In January, the state Supreme Court ruled that the legislature violated the state constitution by failing to "make suitable provisions for finance" of public education. **Kansas NEA,** which supported the plaintiffs in this case—36 students and two districts—is now calling on Kansas lawmakers to "buckle down to do the hard work necessary to maintain and improve our schools."

## New People, New Policies

**ILLINOIS** Using legislation supported by the **Illinois Education Association-NEA,** Governor Rod Blagojevich replaced seven state school board members with people committed to streamlining rules and regulations that hamper the work of teachers and districts. Within four weeks of its formation, the new board eliminated a 15-month backlog of teacher certificate applications in the Chicago district.

## Don't Bludgeon, Bargain!

**MISSOURI** The state Appeals Court has confirmed **Missouri NEA's (MNEA)** view that public employee unions have enforceable rights under state law and negotiated agreements. On four of five counts, the appellate court overturned a lower court decision favoring the Independence school district's unilateral decision to discard long-established negotiated agreements with MNEA teacher and ESP locals—and replace them with a "collaborative team" policy.

In blunt terms, the court expressed "serious reservations" as to whether this top-down approach met the district's legal obligation to "negotiate with the exclusive bargaining representative of each appropriate employee unit."

## Steer Clear of This Place

**PENNSYLVANIA** The **Pennsylvania State Education Association** advises NEA members not to seek employment in the Somerset Area School District, citing its "anti-union environment." The **Somerset Area Education Association (SAEA)** has been bargaining since January 2000, and teachers have not had a pay raise since July 2000. SAEA has filed eight unfair labor practice charges and 39 grievances, costing nearly $19,000.

For more, go to www.nea.org/neatoday/0401/spotlight.html. SAEA President Mary Critchfield may be reached at mmcritch@yahoo.com.

## Report Calls for More Pay

**TEXAS** State Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn has released a report—online at www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/teachersalary04/—warning that "low pay for Texas teachers is driving all too many of our best educators from the profession." Strayhorn is calling for an immediate $3,000 teacher raise; a "competitive, automatic pay increase" every two years; a state-funded mentoring program; and bonuses to teachers whose "low performing schools improve."

"Taken as a package, the proposal provides a basis for addressing the real problems of Texas schools," says **Texas State Teachers Association** President Donna Haschke—who notes that Texas teacher pay is more than $6,000 below the national average.

## Ten Years to Win a Contract

**TENNESSEE** After 10 hard years of bargaining, the **Union County Education Association (UCEA)** has finally reached a new contract with the school board. Over the years, three different school board teams have tried to gut the current contract and destroy this local, but they could not wear the teachers down.

UCEA's winning tactics: legal action against the school board, defeat of several anti-Association board members, and a determined local bargaining team. And the ultimate lever: UCEA membership *increased* during the long ordeal.

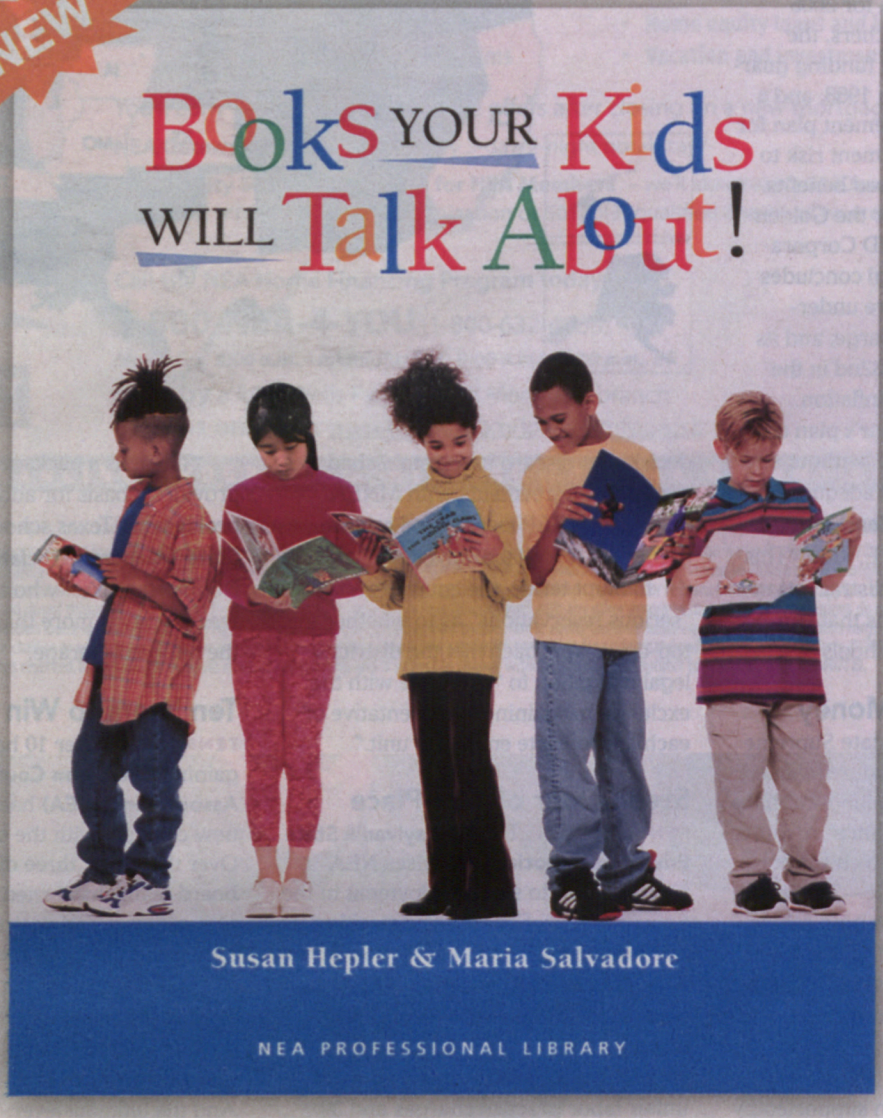
## Solidarity, Plain and Simple

**IOWA** This winter, both the **Burlington Education Association (BEA)** and the **Southeastern Community College Higher Education Association** supported members of United Auto Workers Local 807 locked out in a contract dispute with CNH, a multinational builder of agricultural and construction equipment.

"The community needs to support [CNH] workers," BEA leaders wrote to their local paper. "They help pay the salaries we make and their children are our students....Think about the amount of business generated by a person making a decent amount of money as opposed to minimum wage."

A Guide to Children's Literature for Teachers and Parents (K-6)

NEW

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# 'Intelligent Design' vs. Darwin

## The teaching of evolution comes under fire—again.

While teachers can't be jailed for discussing evolution—that was banned by the Supreme Court in 1968—the evolution controversy has emerged once again. Last October, the Dover (Pennsylvania) Area School District became the first school system in the country to require biology teachers to instruct students in "Intelligent Design," an alternative theory about the origin of life, and to discredit the theory of evolution.

Dover's new policy states: "Students will be made aware of gaps/problems in Darwin's Theory and of other theories of evolution including, but not limited to, Intelligent Design."

Daily Times

SCOPES IS FOUND GUILTY

In the beginning, it was a crime in some states to teach Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in public schools. In fact, high school biology teacher **John Scopes** was convicted and fined in 1925 for violating Tennessee's anti-evolution law. Scopes gave up teaching for good.

Intelligent design is a theory that certain features of life and the universe are so complex that they had to be the product of some master intellect—an intelligent, supernatural designer—rather than the product of natural selection or random mutations, as Darwinists argue.

After intense media coverage, the Dover school board announced last November that science teachers would implement the curriculum change simply by reading to all ninth-grade biology classes a 10-sentence statement prepared by the board. That statement says, in part: "Because Darwin's Theory is a theory, it is still being tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence."

In December, a group of 11 parents sued the Dover board, claiming that intelligent design is not a valid scientific theory, but a religious belief that cannot be taught in public schools.

And the Dover High School science faculty took collective action as well. With the help of the Pennsylvania State Education Association, the science teachers sent the superintendent a joint letter on January 6, strongly objecting to the requirement that they read the prepared statement in class.

That mandate, the teachers wrote, "will inevitably (and understandably) [lead students to] believe that Intelligent Design is a valid scientific theory, perhaps on par with the theory of evolution. That is not true." They declared: "INTELLIGENT DESIGN IS NOT SCIENCE, . . . IS NOT BIOLOGY, . . . AND. . . IS NOT ACCEPTED SCIENTIFIC THEORY."

In response to the teachers' protest, the superintendent announced the following day that teachers would not be required to read the statement, which will be read by administrators instead.

In addition, the school district sent a letter to parents promising, "Our teachers will not be teaching Intelligent Design or the Origin of Life," and advising that children can leave class while the ID statement is being read. The science teachers have said that they also will leave the classroom while the reading takes place.

For Eugenie Scott, Executive Director of the National Center for Science Education, the stakes in the Dover lawsuit are exceedingly high. In 1987, the Supreme Court ruled that schools can't teach creationism—the doctrine that a "supernatural creator was responsible for the creation of humankind"—in science classes. That's because it is a "religious doctrine" based on the Bible, and to teach religion as science violates the Establishment Clause.

Scott says that the creationists have learned that you can't use the "c" word, so they have turned to intelligent design, which she calls "creationism lite." If the Dover school district wins the pending lawsuit, Scott predicts that the "intelligent design curriculum will pop up everywhere." She adds that the goal of many creationists is to discredit evolution, and that there were anti-evolution activities in 24 states last year.

Meanwhile, in Georgia, six parents sued the Cobb County School Board last fall, challenging its order to paste a disclaimer in all of the district's biology textbooks. The sticker stated: "Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered."

In January, a federal district judge agreed with the plaintiffs and ordered the stickers removed because they send "a message that the school board agrees with the beliefs of Christian fundamentalists and creationists." The school board, the court added, has "improperly entangled itself with religion by appearing to take a position [in favor of] religious theories of origin."

MICHAEL D. SIMPSON
*NEA Office of General Counsel*

PHOTO LEFT: SCHOOL OF LAW/UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-KANSAS CITY ©2000; RIGHT: ©BETTMAN/CORBIS

# GROWING PAINS

**You can't miss it. America's children are expanding. Those energetic preteens who once just needed to drop a little "baby fat" have been replaced with a profoundly alarming picture—rotund fifth graders with diabetes and hefty high school seniors graduating with a heightened risk of cancer and heart disease. Health experts call it a national crisis, but educators are fighting back—and in a big way.**

BY SHEREE CRUTE

**DEBORAH MORRIS BEGAN SEEING THE TELLTALE SIGNS IN** her Oakland, California, classroom years ago. "The kids came to school every morning with soda, a bag of Doritos, and a candy bar—that was their breakfast of champions," says this resource specialist for special education students at Fremont's Youth Empowerment High School. A stickler for healthy eating, she knew it was all wrong—and the impact became evident the longer she taught. "Their diet was affecting their energy levels and ability to concentrate"—not to mention their waistlines, she says. Now, Morris is facing this stark reality every day: "Almost one-third of the kids in our school," she says, "are overweight."

Disturbing, yes. But Morris knows her students are not alone. Nationally, some 9 million children are overweight or obese, and the numbers are growing so fast that some health experts are calling it a national crisis.

"Epidemic is absolutely the correct word for what we're seeing," says David Ludwig, M.D., director of the obesity program and the Children's Optimal Weight for Life (OWL) program, at Children's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. "In children ages 6 to 19, of all genders and races, we've seen a three-fold increase [since the late 1970s] in the number who are overweight or obese," says Ludwig. And in children 8 to 10 years old, he says, there's been an "extraordinary" increase in type II diabetes—once, but no longer, called adult-onset diabetes.

**Epidemic is absolutely the correct word for what we're seeing.**
—DAVID LUDWIG

While the epidemic touches children of all cultures, a disproportionately high number of Hispanic and African-American children are overweight, and now even the youngest of children appear to be at risk. In December 2004, the American Heart Association reported 10 percent of American children ages 2 to 5 are also overweight, a 7 percent increase since 1994.

The situation has become so dire that across the country, school districts like Oakland and educators like Morris are taking matters into their own hands—banning junk food, starting new fitness and nutrition programs, and saying no to high-fat cafeteria fare. What they understand: the unhealthier students are, the more vulnerable their chances for academic success.

## A High Price

"If kids aren't healthy, their learning suffers," says Jerry Newberry, executive director of the NEA Health Information Network, "and research shows that sedentary kids who eat high-sugar, high-fat meals may have poorer cognitive skills, higher anxiety levels, and problems with hyperactivity."

Not surprisingly, unhealthy kids also miss school more. Action for Healthy Kids, a group of 40 health and education agencies (including NEA) that partners with schools in every state, recently reported that "tens of millions of dollars" are lost because of absenteeism caused by inactivity and poor nutrition.

Then there are the emotional downsides: overweight chil-

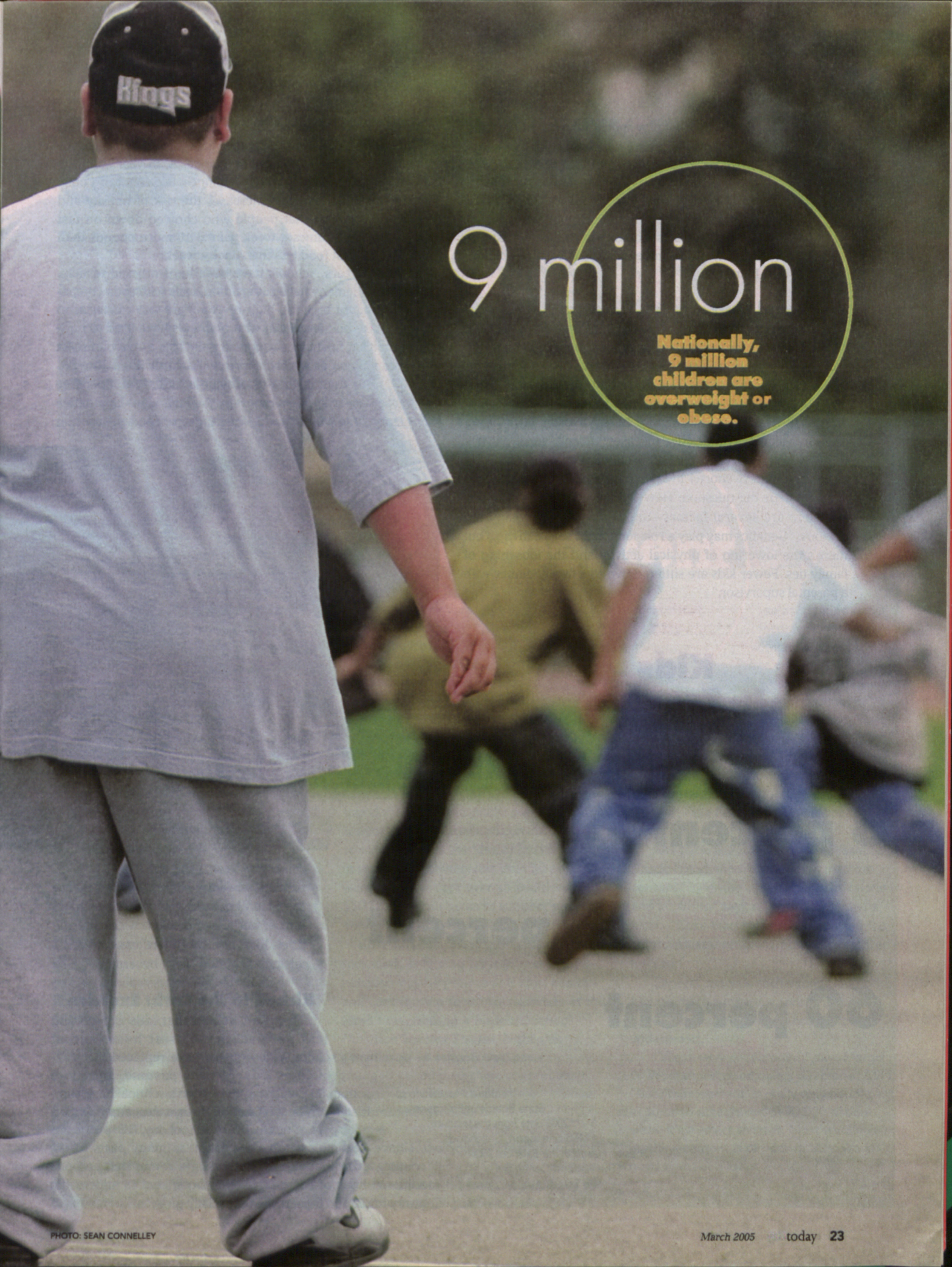


PHOTO: SEAN CONNELLEY

# GROWING PAINS

dren who can't play sports, who can barely fit in their chairs at school, who can't get through a school day without being bullied and ostracized by their peers. "The psychological risks of obesity can be as great as the physical risks," warns Ted Feinberg, assistant executive director of the National Association of School Psychologists. "Low self-esteem and depression can undermine children's learning, behavior, and well-being."

## A Cultural Shift

Unfortunately, say health experts, the current crisis only portends graver days ahead. "The rate of obesity in childhood predicts adult obesity," explains David Katz, M.D., a nutrition expert and director of the Yale Prevention Research Center at the Yale School of Medicine. And that, he says, can spell a lifetime of ill-health—in the form of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other diseases. Indeed, some experts estimate that children in the nation's youngest generation may be the first to have shorter lives than their parents.

It all begs the question: How did it come to this? Experts say there are several factors—and for educators, many are obvious. "Genetics may play a role for some," says Ludwig, "but there's the lowering of physical activity and the loosening of family ties. Fewer kids are sitting down to a family dinner with a parental supervisor."

With working parents busier than ever, he says, fast, processed, and prepackaged foods have become the gastronomical delight of choice—but at a price. A 15-year study by Ludwig and Mark Perreira at the Minnesota School of Public Health found that fast food increases the risk of obesity and type II diabetes and that people who chowed down on fast food two or three times a week gained 10 more pounds than those who ate fast food less than once a week.

Over the years, schools have been hard-pressed to help. Cash-strapped, many have cut vending deals with soda companies and brought high-fat, high-revenue fare into cafeterias to balance shaky budgets. Even where schools have tried to buck the trend, it's a financial struggle. It still costs a school district more than twice as much to provide a high-fiber, low-fat, veggie burger than it does to provide a higher-fat, fiber-free hamburger, according to a report by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a Washington-based group that promotes healthy eating. That's because the federal government subsidizes hamburger and other meats but not alternatives like soy, or in the case of milk, calcium-rich, non-dairy beverages.

## Kicked to the Curb: Exercise

It hasn't helped that kids are getting less physical activity—at home and at school. Video games have replaced the playground as kids' favorite pastime, and more than 50 percent of the nation's schools have eliminated physical education classes altogether. Once a regular part of nearly every school day, P.E. programs have become rare to nonexistent in many parts of the country, even though researchers have found that just one additional hour of P.E. per week is significant in addressing obesity for 5- and 6-year-olds, especially girls.

### Kids In Trouble

**9 million**
children over age 6 are obese. Another 15 percent are borderline and at risk.***

**8 percent**
of elementary schools, 6.4 percent of middle schools, and 5.8 percent of high schools have daily physical education.*

**13 percent**
of white children ages 12 to 19 are overweight, 21 percent of African-American children ages 12 to 19 are overweight, and 23 percent of Mexican-American adolescents are overweight.***

**60 percent**
of children ages 5 to 10 had at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease.**

*National Association of State Boards of Education
**2004 data from the Institute of Medicine report, *Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance, 2004.*
***The National Center for Health Statistics

PHOTO: NATHAN HAM

# Candy or Carrots?

They lure school kids with the promise of sweets, tempt administrators with the promise of money, and draw ire from health experts who see nothing but the promise of overweight kids.

Vending machines. They're increasingly drawing fire in the obesity wars because they expose a bottom-line dilemma: Americans want healthier children but may not be willing to pay the financial cost. Despite calorie-laden offerings that erode health and fitness, vending offers a fiscal lifeline to school systems drowning in red ink.

"Many school districts have tried to close budget deficits by peddling soft drinks to kids," says David Ludwig, M.D., director of the Children's Optimal Weight for Life (OWL) program at Children's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. But this, he maintains, "is one of the worst investments a society could make."

Why all the fuss? The answer is in the machine.

A May 2004 study by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) found that of 9,723 school vending machine slots surveyed:

- **70 PERCENT** held soft drinks with sugar
- **42 PERCENT** held candy
- **5 PERCENT** offered milk (and less than half of those offerings were low-fat).

This is bad news to health and fitness advocates who want healthier choices for kids. Sugary food is a problem, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on School Nutrition. "Sweetened soft drinks in the schools," it says, "contribute to overweight or obesity, displacement of milk consumption, dental cavities, and enamel erosion."

Other health experts say vending is a direct assault on burgeoning attempts to improve breakfast and lunch fare in the cafeteria. "I don't think there should be vending machines at all, because it undermines what you can do in the cafeteria," says Marion Nestle, a child nutrition expert who chairs New York University's Department of Nutrition. "It also separates kids who can't afford it from those who can. Everyone should eat the cafeteria offerings."

**33 percent**

**of children eat fast food every day.**

Studies show many taxpayers agree. But getting there—well, that's the problem. A recent study by RTI, a firm that conducts surveys on public health policy, found that while the public overwhelmingly supports adding nutrition curricula to schools and likes the idea of healthy food in vending machines, less than 50 percent were willing to fork over an additional $100 per year in taxes to support such anti-obesity efforts.

The solution, many school administrators think, is finding ways to make good nutrition pay—by improving kids' health and contributing to school expenses at the same time. *Making It Happen! School Nutrition Success Stories,* highlights activities at 16 schools that have changed vending machine content and experienced either no change in revenue or increased revenue:

**IN SOUTHINGTON, CONNECTICUT,** for example, the Southington school lunch program installed a milk vending machine with low-fat and fat-free choices. They cut a deal to keep 20 percent of monthly sales, gaining extra income for programs without any extra labor costs.

**AT HAMPDEN ACADEMY,** a public school in Hampden, Maine, administrators maintained vending machine income levels by letting the kids choose. "We had students choose the healthy foods they wanted," says Richard Lyons, superintendent of schools. "We had taste-test sessions with low-fat yogurt and other choices."

**BABCOCK MIDDLE SCHOOL,** in Westerly, Rhode Island, modified vending machine content "by giving all vendors strict calorie and fat limits," says school nurse Michelle Iacoi. "Coke machines once supported the sports booster program, now there's water instead."

Experts concede such inroads are good, but say more aggressive solutions still are needed to make healthy vending more widespread.

"We're very encouraged," says Margo G. Wootan, nutrition policy director at CSPI, "but [improvement] is really only happening in 30 or so schools out of 90,000 nationwide. It's a select snippet. Most vending machine content is of poor quality. We still need to make a lot of changes."

—S.C.

PHOTO: DANNY PECK

# GROWING PAINS

Bruce Hanson, a physical education teacher at Fairview Elementary School in Westminster, Colorado, says he's seeing the results of inactivity every day: many of his kids can't run a minute around the track without stopping. "They could do it a decade ago but today's kids can't handle it," he says. "They're struggling."

Compounding matters: the so-called No Child Left Behind law, which has put pressure on schools to spend less time on P.E. and more time preparing students for make-or-break standardized tests. Educators say the shift is ironic given the link between fitness and academic success. A University of Miami survey, for example, found that fit high school seniors had higher grade point averages and less depression than their peers.

## Junk-free Heaven

Luckily, many educators are getting the message, and have begun doing battle to reclaim the health of their students. Several years ago, Deborah Morris' Oakland school district, along with Berkeley and San Francisco, began tackling the problem with innovative—some would say even revolutionary—ideas.

Declaring its schools junk-free zones, Oakland banned the sale of sugary drinks and candy in vending machines. It even outlawed that staple of every school fundraiser, the half-pound chocolate bar. Not everyone was ecstatic about the changes, officials there note. The students wanted their soda, candy, ice cream, and cookies back. And the sports coaches and art teachers worried about losing the vending machine funds that paid for P.E. and art classes.

But at Morris' school, Freemont High, the staff got on board. Teachers chatted with students about the connection between their health and their diets and modeled healthy eating habits. Now, Morris says, "When I eat my tofu salad in front of the kids, they ask 'What's that?' They're really fascinated. It gives them something to think about. I've even heard kids say—gasp!— they're sick of McDonald's."

## A Discipline Fix?

But change comes slowly, Morris found, and when she realized some of her students were still clinging to their old habits, she decided to open The School Store. "I started out with my own money and stocked it with water, low-fat granola bars, and other healthy snacks." She charges 50 cents for snacks but extends credit to any kid who needs it. "I give away a lot of food," she concedes, but notes that the store turns enough of a profit for her to buy more food, help fund the school's art club, and buy other books and supplies.

Still, the real benefit has been in the classroom. "Since we've opened the store and given the kids healthy

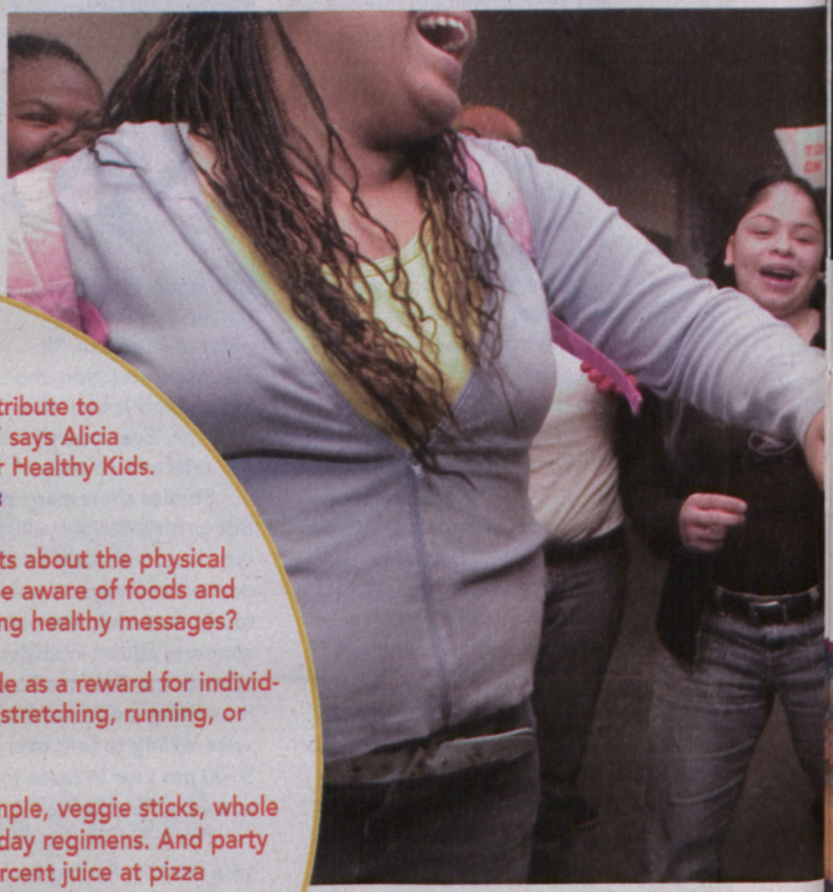

PHOTO: SEAN CONNELLEY

## Fit for Life

"Even small steps in the classroom can contribute to healthier students and school environments," says Alicia Moag-Stahlberg, executive director of Action for Healthy Kids. She offers these **tips for teachers:**

**BE ROLE MODELS FOR HEALTHY HABITS.** Talk to students about the physical activities they enjoy, such as walking or riding a bike. Be aware of foods and drinks you consume in front of students. Are you sending healthy messages?

**USE HEALTHY INCENTIVES.** Use a walk or playtime outside as a reward for individual students or an entire class. Take a break for movement (stretching, running, or jumping in place) to rekindle energy on a stressful day.

**BRING BRAIN FOOD.** Incorporate healthy snacks (for example, veggie sticks, whole grain crackers and cheese, fruit, low-sugar cereal) into test-day regimens. And party smart by replacing soft drinks with flavored milk or 100 percent juice at pizza parties. Bring carrot and celery sticks with dip to offer on the side.

**STAGE A CHALLENGE.** Have students track their activity and meals daily, challenging each other to increase the number of minutes they are active.

**STAY COMMITTED.** Helping students develop healthy habits now will benefit them for life. Research shows that healthy habits translate into more success in the classroom right now: better attendance, better behavior, and overall better performance.

Left: Students at Freemont High can now purchase water and low-fat snacks at their school. Top: Students in Berkeley load up on organic vegetables from the salad bar.

nutrition breaks in the morning and afternoon, we have fewer discipline issues," says principal and former teacher Maureen Benson. "Teacher referrals for problems are down 10 to 12 percent." The connection may not be coincidental. A Brooklyn College study found that children with behavior problems, especially attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, could be sensitive to certain foods, including refined sugars and food additives that cause them to act out even more.

And so, at Oakland's Roosevelt Middle School, students trained as peer health educators talk to their classmates about topics like fat and sugar in a cool way. "They talk about things teenagers can relate to," says Samantha Blackburn, school nurse and director of the school-based health center, "like making healthier choices at fast food restaurants or the corner convenience store."

Across the bridge in the San Francisco school district, a tough "no more empty calories" policy sets maximum levels for sugar, fat, and saturated fat and allows only snacks with a minimum of 5 percent of eight essential nutrients in the schools' vending machines and à la carte cafeteria selections. Suspensions have dropped 50 percent since the policy was implemented, officials say.

In the nearby Berkeley Unified School District, the nutrition policy includes organic gardens, salad bars, and cooking classes. And as part of a pilot program that will be the first of its kind in the country, the district will revise its curriculum to integrate lessons on farming, cooking, and nutrition into core subject areas.

In other parts of the country, some school districts are taking the controversial step of including students' body mass index (a measure of body fat) on their report cards—an effort to involve parents.

## A Role for Everybody

Whatever the approach to reform, teachers and support professionals are showing support in many places and taking leading roles in others. Take Brockway Elementary School in Pennsylvania. Visit Brockway any Wednesday morning and you'll see 100 to 200 kids and 10 to 30 adults walking to school as part of their "Walking Wednesdays" program.

"We realized that our students' academics could only improve if they felt good about themselves," explains Kim Faulk, fifth-grade teacher and volunteer wellness coordinator. To fund "Walking Wednesdays" and other wellness activities, the school applied for and received a $10,000 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield along with several mini-grants. Now Brockway enjoys a Fun and Fitness after-school program with noncompetitive games and activities, hand sanitizers in every classroom, a nutritional curriculum that one teacher at every grade level is trained to use, and after-school cooking demonstrations.

Health activists say initiatives like these get everybody at a school plugged in, not just P.E. teachers and nutritionists. They note there's no shortage of advice on how the science teacher or even the school secretary can make their marks (see "Fit for

PHOTO: MARC COPLAN

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Life," page 26). "There's definitely a role here for educators," says Mary McKenna, a nutritionist and health scientist at the Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. As one of a group of experts working on *Making It Happen! School Nutrition Success Stories* (a report on 32 public schools and districts with innovative meal programs), McKenna's seen firsthand what educators can do when they decide to bring about change. NEA HIN's Newberry echoes the sentiment. It's one reason his organization has created SmartBODY, a fitness and nutrition Web site for educators and parents (see "'Get Fit' Online!" page 31).

It's all about getting informed and inspired, says Newberry. *NEA Today* found a few members who are doing just that.

## SUMMER FITNESS FUN

**ROSS DARNER** has pulled off an amazing feat; he's made school the coolest place to be in Kalispell, Montana, in the summertime. In a town of hardworking parents, with 61 percent of kids on free or reduced-price lunch programs, Darner, an Evergreen High School physical education teacher, realized that "lots of the kids were idle in the summer" while their parents were at work and most often unable to afford expensive trips or camps.

"I'd also read about obesity being the number two preventable cause of death, just below tobacco," says Darner. "I thought that if we could get kids healthy at a young age, they had a better chance of being healthy adults." His idea: create the summer Evergreen Fitness Team and get those kids out of the house and on their feet.

To create a state-of-the-art fitness room, Darner and other Evergreen staff members, working with the guidance of Action for Healthy Kids, secured a Physical Education Program (PEP) grant for nearly $90,000. A fund-raising carnival and help from local businesses did the rest. Evergreen High now boasts its very own climbing wall, fitness and weight machines, heart monitors for kids, a summer staff, and a mountain of high-tech equipment that can measure students' blood pressure, body fat, strength, and flexibility. "We

## Health Care: Let's Insure Every Kid

Obesity-linked illnesses are sending growing numbers of children to doctors' offices and hospitals. That's the sad truth. Even worse: without adequate health insurance coverage, many wouldn't get any treatment at all.

Most experts will tell you: Success at school starts with good health coverage, and children who don't have it are compromising their immediate health and long-term development. Students who don't have health insurance have more untreated health problems, get sick more often, and miss school 25 percent more than their insured classmates, says the Children's Defense Fund.

Moreover, poor students, who need the most help, are least likely to have adequate health insurance. About one-fourth of all low-income children are uninsured, according to a policy brief from the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

**127 million**

**Obesity-associated hospital costs for young people have more than tripled in 20 years, growing from $35 million to $127 million in 2004.**

For those and other reasons NEA supports universal health coverage—for children and adults alike. NEA's legislative program affirms NEA's support for "a national health care policy that will mandate universal coverage with the highest quality health care at the lowest possible cost."

And we're not alone. NEA belongs to the National Coalition of Health Care, along with other labor groups, health care and medical non-profits, and even a few corporations. Last year, the Coalition published *Building a Better Health Care System*, a report laying out principles for reforming the health care system. "Every American should have health care coverage," the report says. "Participation should be mandatory."

Programs like Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) have helped reduce the number of poor children without health coverage, even as the number of all uninsured Americans rose to 45 million. But more progress is essential.

"There's no doubt the situation has improved overall, but we still have anywhere from 7 to 9 million uninsured children in this country," says Jeanne Lambrew, who teaches health policy at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

If the Bush Administration goes ahead with its plan to cap Medicaid spending by giving states fixed sums of money in the form of block grants, states will have to cut back on their existing insurance programs, Lambrew says.

Some states are already having problems. Connecticut is considering eliminating 7,000 children from its Medicaid program, for example, and Arkansas is considering increasing eligibility standards and eliminating Medicaid coverage for eye exams and eyeglasses.

Such rollbacks suggest it's up to all of us to make sure policy makers know that kids should come first.

"It will take a tremendous amount of political will to push for coverage for all uninsured children," says Carol Malone, NEA's senior health policy specialist. "Once politicians see the link between health insurance and a child's success in school, then we'll start to make progress."

—CAROLYN WHITE

give kids a printout they can take home to mom and dad," says Darner.

For anyone who thinks kids actually want to be sedentary, think again. In 2003, the program's first year, close to one-half of the fifth and sixth graders and some seventh and eighth graders, including obese kids, volunteered for two-and-one-half hours of weights and cardiovascular workouts. The demand for this year has already exceeded last year's numbers. "It's great for the kids," Darner says. "They look forward to it and have somewhere to go." More important, the students became healthier. "Across the board, we saw a drop in blood pressure in kids who completed the program," Darner proudly proclaims.

Left: **Ross Darner's** students work out in a state-of-the-art gym. Above: **Carol Goodrow** runs with her students three times a week.

## RUNNING FOR LIFE

CAROL GOODROW'S regular duties as a special education resource room teacher had little to do with safeguarding kids' health and wellness, but that didn't stop her from wanting to help. "I thought I'd share my passion," says Goodrow, who fell in love with running in her 40s. So she created Happy Feet, Healthy Food, a running, writing, and nutrition program for the students at her school, Birch Grove Primary in Toland, Connecticut.

Each Friday morning, and after school on Mondays and Thursdays, Goodrow and her students hit the road. After each run, they settle down and write their thoughts in their running journals in Goodrow's colorful classroom—a space where marathon-running fruit spell out the alphabet across the ceiling and snapshots of her runners proudly enjoying healthy snacks decorate the walls. "I don't force anything," she says, "but we talk about nutrition informally and I praise kids for bringing in healthy foods."

As for the journals, Goodrow asks kids, especially those who have trouble writing, to just tell what they did, what they saw or felt. "Healthy eating makes you skinny," one little boy wrote, "and it makes you run like lightning." Another little girl explained, "Before I came to the club, I used to eat only candy. I talked about it with my Dad and he said fruit is just as sweet and good for you. Now, I only eat fruit."

"There are a small number of high-risk kids in my program," Goodrow explains, "but this is different from gym. This is fitness for life that I'm teaching."

## GLOBE-TROTTING

Getting kids moving—in body, mind, and spirit—is BARBARA WENTWORTH'S special gift. In 1991, Wentworth, a physical education teacher at Magee Elementary School in Genesee Depot Wisconsin, came up with the idea of calculating the actual miles to a destination, such as Jamaica, then giving her students activities—everything from mowing the lawn to aerobics—they could use to "earn" miles toward that destination. As a bonus, maps and other activities could be coordinated with the students' other teachers and integrated into the

PHOTOS LEFT: JENNIFER DEMONTE; RIGHT: JONATHAN OLSON

# GROWING PAINS

curriculum. Arrival at a destination would be celebrated with a fun physical activity, like a limbo party. "It worked so well," Wentworth says, "that I tried a new destination each year, until I came up with my biggest hit—the Mt. Everest climb."

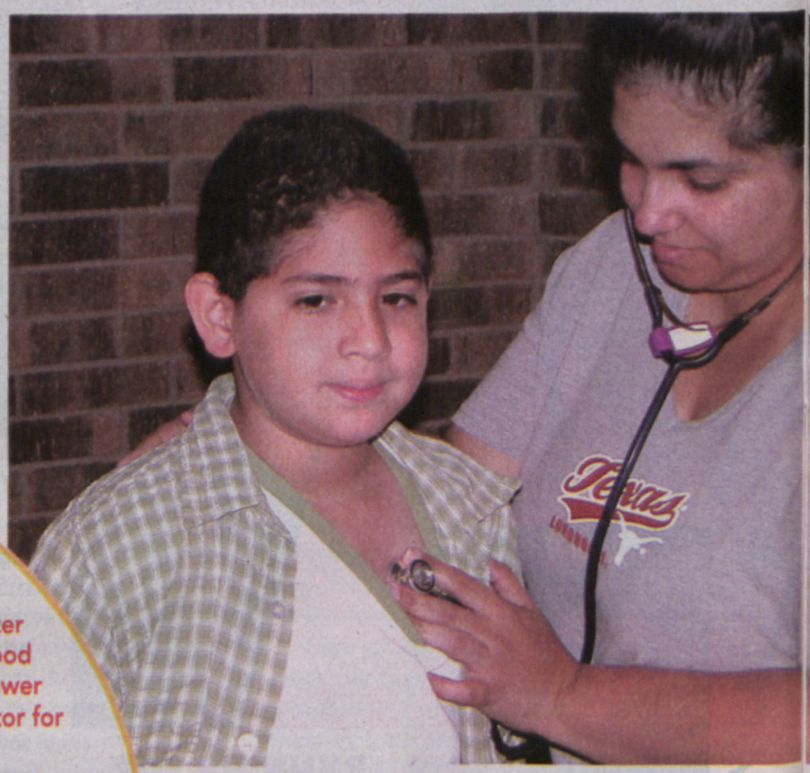
If Wentworth's idea sounds familiar, it should. "The Department of Education heard about my work and asked me to talk about the Everest program with staff from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Public Instruction," Wentworth recalls. Months later, Wentworth was proud to find her program was part of the CDC's health initiative for kids ages 9 to 13.

Now that obesity is a nationwide concern, Wentworth talks to her students about their activity level and comes up with ideas to encourage healthy eating. For example, she asks kids to choose between fruits and M&M's. Once they choose, they have to walk off the amount of calories they'd gain from eating their choice. "The kids who choose M&M's can't believe how far they have to walk," Wentworth says.

Wentworth also gets parents on their feet. Children earn miles with the following formula: one mile for each half-hour of moderate activity and two miles for each half-hour of high activity. They earn double miles if they can get their parents to "work out" with them or if they volunteer for an activity, like cleaning up the lawn of an elderly person. "It teaches kids to be community members," says Wentworth, "and now we have lots of parent participation." Perhaps best of all, Wentworth's program embraces a new concept of physical fitness. "In our program, a child, no matter what weight, can find an activity and be as successful as the other children—every child can do something," says an enthusiastic Wentworth. The days of gym class for athletes and the bench for everyone else are definitely over.

## TAKING A STAND

Starr County, Texas, is hardly a household name, but it could easily be ground zero for any childhood obesity researcher. Tucked into a rough and tumble stretch of land at the border of Rio Grande City, this community of primarily Mexican immigrants sees 24 percent of its children become overweight or obese by age 4. After kindergarten, the number rises to 28 percent; and by elementary school the number is 50 percent for boys and 35 percent for girls. But Starr County is also a place where life is shaped by hard work and love is often defined by what you can give to your children—even if that's just their favorite treats. This traditional culture where food equals love has made ROEL GONZALEZ'S job that much harder.



As Starr County's superintendent of schools, Gonzalez was more than happy to overhaul the school's nutrition plan when the University of Texas health science center offered funds and assistance through DiRReCT (Diabetes Reduction via Community-based Telemedia), their diabetes risk-reduction program.

"Our rate of diabetes is so high, we had to do something," says Gonzalez. So the program's pediatric nutritionist Peggy Visio began working with food service director Edna Ramon

PHOTO: PEGGY VISIO

## Food For Thought

Food service workers often find themselves in the eye of the storm when the alarm is sounded for better cafeteria fare, but often their hands are tied by district food policies. Rest easy. "Food service personnel have more power than they might think," says Amy Joy Lanou, nutrition director for the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. She offers some hands-on **tips for cafeteria workers:**

**ENCOURAGE CHILDREN** to choose the healthiest options—fresh fruit rather than gelatin and carrots rather than french fries.

**SPEAK POSITIVELY** about healthy food choices such as whole grains, bean dishes, fruits, and vegetables and avoid glamorizing less healthful choices such as ice cream, fried foods, sweets, and meaty, cheesy dishes.

**WHEN YOU CAN,** cook with less oil. When possible bake or grill rather than fry or pan-fry. Serve fresh foods rather than canned, breaded, or sweetened. Test recipes that have lower fat, sugar, and salt content.

**KEEP YOUR SALAD BAR** well-stocked, attractive, and encourage kids to choose meals from it.

Left: Starr County students are screened for diabetes. Above: **Barbara Wentworth's** (shown in inset) student "climbs" Mt. Everest.

to modify—but still honor—the traditional Mexican menu.

Gonzalez didn't count on the initial opposition, however. As soon as menu changes went into effect, industrious, round-faced fourth and fifth graders posted signs outside their cafeterias demanding the return of their pizza, nachos, and burritos.

Some parents thought Gonzalez, a local boy, had turned his back on his culture. "An angry mom wanted to know why we were feeding her child specially made small, low-fat, high-fiber bagels instead of four or five of her homemade flour tortillas for breakfast," Gonzalez says. "And we still have parents who stuff kids' bags with Cheetos.

To address parents' concerns, Gonzalez formed a team that included Alicia Longoria, a 27-year home economics teacher who's now the district's assistant food service director for parental involvement. "We now have food and nutrition classes for parents in low-fat cooking. And even though the kids had never seen food like English muffins, they love the food program now," she says.

"They also get 45 minutes of physical education three times a week. The kids are active—they're outside and they're running—and many of the parents are now very thankful. They tell us they see a difference in their children." nea

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY SABRINA HOLCOMB AND MIKE TUCKER

## 'Get Fit' Online!

**Starving for good nutrition and fitness information? Go to www.nea.org/neatodayextra!**

**Visit the SmartBODY Fitness Information Center,** an NEA Health Information Network Web site devoted to fitness, weight management, and stress reduction.

**Chat online with nutrition expert David Katz, M.D.,** who will answer your questions on how to eat healthier later this month. Submit your questions by March 10.

**Calculate your body mass index.** Stop guessing whether you or your students are in the danger zone. Learn what it really means to be overweight or obese.

**Answer our survey question:** Do you think a student's body mass index (BMI) should be included in his or her report card?

**Link up with Action for Healthy Kids and lots more resources** on obesity, nutrition, and fitness, including an executive summary of *Making it Happen! School Nutrition Success Stories.*

PHOTOS: PETER ZUZGA

# You Spend Whaaaatt?!

New wheels for you or new reading material for them? In an NEA online survey, educators reveal their generous spending habits and add up the piles of cash they fork over for classroom equipment and student supplies.

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY

For the love of reading: History teacher **Monica Houston** spent hundreds of dollars on books for her classroom at an African-American history museum last summer.

For her budding Van Goghs, New Jersey kindergarten teacher Karen Burrow bought art books; for her story-lovers, she stocked her room with children's literature. She couldn't pass up a publication that matched a current classroom theme. And she couldn't resist the latest research in education.

But that's not all. On the first day of school, she gave every kid a book to keep—"to welcome them on their new adventure"—plus two more at Christmas. "I love to read," Burrow explains—and she wants to spark the same passion for literacy in her students.

That kind of enthusiasm, while admirable, also is expensive. Last year, according to an unscientific online *NEA Today* survey of 660 members, the average educator spent $1,180 in non-reimbursed expenses—mostly on books ($254), lesson materials ($215), and incentives for students ($174). Yes, you sacrificed, shared, and subsidized. And, hopefully, you wrote it all down—next month, educators can deduct $250 in out-of-pocket costs from their federal taxes.

"Teaching is an expensive job," notes Micah Rodriguez, a California elementary teacher who shelled out $3,000 last year. About a third of her output went for motivational gifts—things like pencil boxes and math flash cards—to reward her English-learners for progress that might not meet the "standards" of traditional honor rolls.

From seaweed to turkey feed, from Nerf balls to cow eyeballs, the shopping list is innovative, extensive, and a little eccentric. (Yes, real eyeballs! Chris Vasquez uses the bovine peepers to teach San Diego fifth-graders about the anatomy of sight.)

"I *still* have dill pickles in the refrigerator!" exclaims Indiana media specialist Steve Spencer, who made "green monsters" with his students after they read about a boy who accidentally drops a dill pickle into the fudge at his grandfather's ice cream shop. He, of course, bought the pickles.

Frequently, though, it's not the extras, but basic necessities, that you're buying. You spent a good chunk of change on reading books: Dayton history teacher Monica Houston threw down hundreds this past summer at Denver's African-American history museum. You coughed up cash to paint and clean classrooms. Two of you reported buying copier machines!

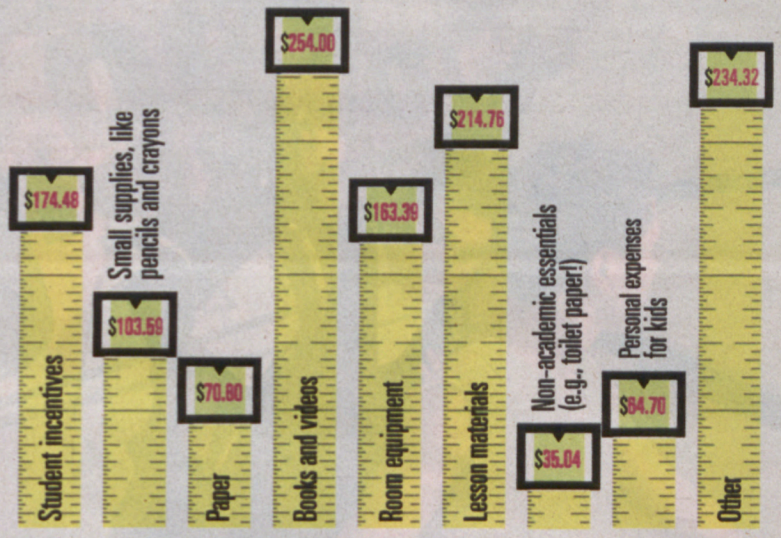
Last year, Utah special education teacher Mary Pearson made her own weighted vest—used to help students with severe disabilities to "de-stimulate" and focus—and she frequently makes and pays for other adaptive devices. "If I don't



PHOTO: JAN UNDERWOOD

## Where Your Money Goes

**Nearly 700 NEA members responded to an online nea.org survey about their out-of-pocket school spending last year. Their total expenses ranged from $50 to $13,000—but the average member said they spent nearly $1,200.**




get enough money (from the district), I have to spend my money—or my students don't have what they need to learn," she says.

Sometimes students don't even have what they need to get dressed in the morning. Rather than watch them walking through winter without a warm coat—one student told his teacher he "couldn't find" socks or underwear in his house—many of you step in.

And sometimes, you find yourself taking care of the whole family. Patricia Ruof, a kindergarten teacher in Buffalo, where

salaries have been frozen by school officials, loaded up her credit card with $1,000 for car repairs for a student's mother. Without it, the recent widow would have lost her job and apartment. Meanwhile, a Missouri teacher bought an urn to keep safe the ashes of a student's mother.

But only Jan Price, a health teacher in eastern Ohio, bought strapless bras. It might seem odd, Price concedes, but she's been buying, begging, and borrowing semi-formal wear for years so that her teenage students can attend band and choir concerts, homecomings, and proms.

"What can I say? I love these kids and all of them deserve to feel special and to fit in regardless of their family and financial situations," Price declares. And, like a veteran shopper, she adds, she once discovered bras on sale for $1 each.

"I couldn't pass that up!"

---

From books to bras to pickles—there's no limit on NEA members' spending to help their students, as **Micah Rodriguez** (top left), **Steve Spencer** (bottom left), and **Jan Price** (right) all know.

PHOTO TOP LEFT: CALIXTRO ROMIAS; BOTTOM LEFT: JOHN TERHUNE; RIGHT: SCOTT SHAW

$13,000

# Biggest Spender!

## Leotards, tights, and barres, oh my!

For all the money Sara Minks spent on her students last year, she could have bought a new car. With $13,000—yes, $13,000!—Minks could have taken her own two children on an Alaskan cruise. Where did it all go?

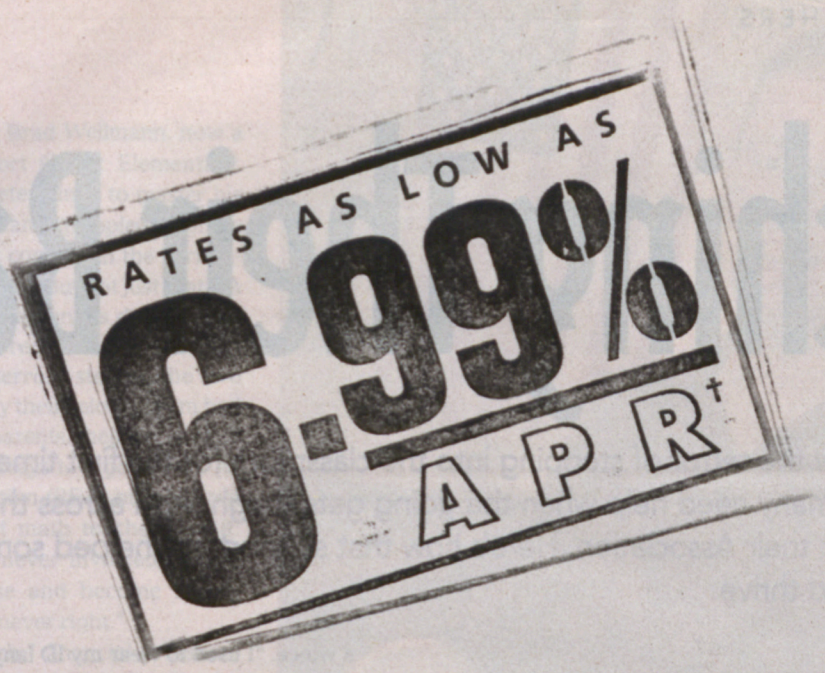
Minks, a high school dance teacher in Southern California, bought music to accompany ballet, jazz, and modern dance performances and videos of historical choreographers at work. She installed fans and ballet barres in her classroom studio, and dressed her kids in leotards, tights, and ballet shoes. She brought them to local productions—and even flew two talented students (and their mothers) across the country to Broadway.

Minks, who is a single mom herself, knows her spending habits have been, well, extreme. But without much time to fundraise or any willingness to cut corners, "I just do it," she says.

She hopes to rein in her philanthropy this year, but not if it costs the kids, she adds. Her students, who are experiencing performing arts for the first time, "walk taller, gain self-confidence, and never miss practice. They cling to this outlet, and I can't imagine taking that away from them." nea

Sara Minks

PHOTO: LARRY ROSE

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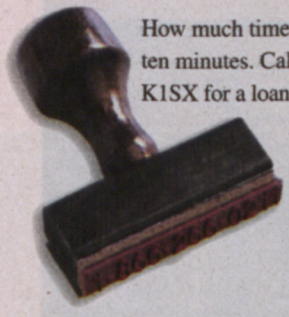
The NEA Personal Loan offers you plenty of options. You can apply for the loan amount that works for you – from $3,000 to $25,000.* And, you can choose how much time you'd like to repay the loan – from 24 months to 84 months. Unlike other loans, this one requires no collateral, allows you to defer payments for 120 days,** (finance charges will accrue, repayment term starts after deferral period) and has no pre-payment penalties.

How much time does it take to apply to help stamp out your debt? Just ten minutes. Call MBNA at 1-866-266-0211 and mention priority code K1SX for a loan decision right over the phone.



**NEA Personal Loan Estimated Monthly Payment Chart**

| Loan Amount | Repayment Term (months) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 24 months | 36 months | 48 months | 60 months | 72 months | 84 months |
| $3,000 | $140 | $96 | $75 | $62 | N/A | N/A |
| $10,000 | $463 | $319 | $248 | $205 | $177 | N/A |
| $15,000 | $694 | $479 | $371 | $307 | $265 | $234 |
| $25,000 | N/A | $797 | $618 | $512 | $441 | $390 |

All payment amounts and terms are estimates based on an APR of 6.99%†. Your APR may be higher. See below for important APR disclosures.

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# Catching Their Backs

**New teachers know the terror of stepping into the classroom for the first time. No matter how talented they are, many need help when the going gets tough. And across the country they're getting it—through their Association. Here's how that support has helped some Nebraska newbies survive and thrive.**

BY DAVE WINANS

To watch English teacher Wendy Grojean walk confidently down the halls of Bellevue East High School in Bellevue, Nebraska, is to witness a picture of sheer determination. Enthusiastic, direct, and clearly respected by students—it's hard to imagine that just four years ago Grojean was new to the game, and enduring bigtime stress. For starters, "I was 21 and was told I looked very young," Grojean says with a wince. "I used to wear my ID lanyard all the time." Then, she says, there were the sobering challenges of classroom organization and management and "getting ahold of complex rules and policies, paperwork and special ed procedures, tardy referrals, and so on."

Grojean bravely tried to control a situation that controlled her, wearing eyeglasses, suits, and that *look*. "I tried to be harsh and authoritarian with students, but it just wasn't me," she recalls with a sigh.

After a stressful start, English teacher **Wendy Grojean** is now a confident practitioner—and an Association building rep.

PHOTOS: EARL RICHARDSON

The tale was similar for Brad Wellmann, now a second-year teacher at Fort Crook Elementary. Calm, methodical, and as determined to master his situation as Grojean, Wellmann grappled mightily with the high demands that come with the curriculum new teachers have to teach. But not just that. "A child actually pounded his head on his desk—in the first hour of my first day!" he recalls.

Such "new-teacher-in-terror" stories, the two soon discovered, were hardly theirs alone. From bad student behavior to absent parents, their peers were facing it all, too. And not always to a good end. As Bellevue Education Association (BEA) building rep Mark Still, a Bellevue East math teacher, put it: "When parents who were never involved believe what their kid says is true and become super-involved, the new teacher is never right."

Toss in the "time crunch," financial pressures from massive student loans, and the attitude of a handful of vets who tend to doubt new teachers' knowledge and experience, and it was no surprise that Grojean and Wellmann found themselves reaching for support.

Fortunately for them, they say, BEA and its state affiliate, the Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA), had their backs, making every difference in their ability to survive—and thrive—in a tough new profession. Now, not only do the two star teachers get admiring nods from their veteran peers; both have felt confident enough to become local Association leaders—Wellmann a BEA executive board member and Grojean a local building rep.

The evolution didn't happen by chance. For years Nebraska Association leaders have been refining the art of attracting and supporting new teachers—spurring them on to activism, too—and what they've created is considered nothing short of a national model. In Bellevue alone, the local has signed up 90 percent of the district's certified staff, including 62 of this year's 64 new teachers. Those stats, says fourth-grade teacher Wellmann, a former NEA Student Program activist, made a huge impression when he was hired. "When people feel alone, they start to feel intimidated," he notes. "I knew how strong as a whole we were. I accepted a building rep position on my second day."

Second-year elementary teacher **Brad Wellmann,** above, is already a local Association officer. That's encouraging news for veteran local leader **Yvonne Goodman,** far left, leaned on by high school building rep **Sheri Schuttler.**

## Power in Numbers

Fact is, high membership and teacher support go together like a hand and glove in the Cornhusker State. Carmen Quesada, NEA's director of national membership strategy, calls the phenomenon Nebraska's "culture of membership," fastidiously created over time. "Members ask members to join the Association, making it 'unacceptable' to be a non-member," she says.

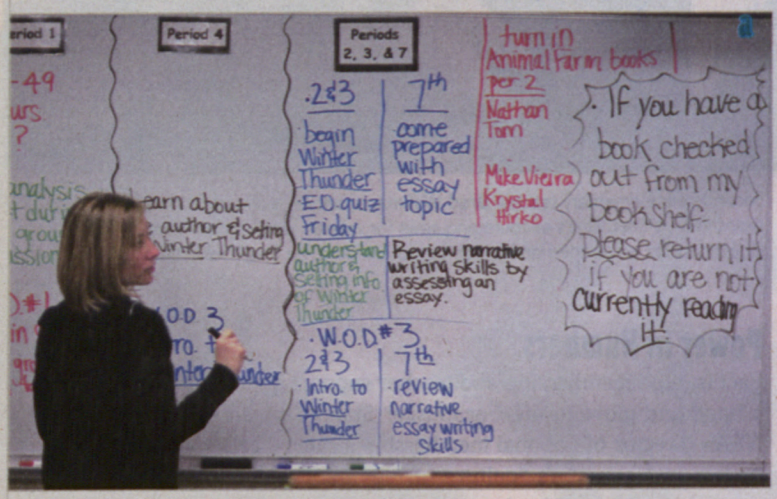
That's the story in South Sioux City, Nebraska, where the NSEA local affiliate has signed up 93 percent of its teacher potential, and third-year elementary behavior disorder teacher Jerad Wulf feels confident enough to serve as local vice president. Wulf, age 25, agrees "there's an expectation here that you will join and you will see the benefits."

Those benefits include clout. As a union advocate trained by NSEA, Wulf knows how to assist new teachers and vets "in the most unpleasant times." And he's proud of a local communications strategy that keeps newbies "well-informed" (a priority for younger folks) and generates favorable local press coverage of teachers' work. And not to forget a political action program that recently helped elect a pro-public education school board candidate by more than 1,000 votes.

Farther south in Bellevue, the high-membership BEA has consistently helped elect an activist school board that supports the work of Superintendent John Deegan. He's a 34-year district employee who maintains a strong working relationship with the union— "my job just gets easier working with the teachers' Association"—and a firm conviction that "you should treat new teachers the way you'd want to be treated."

Deegan, who advises all new hires to join BEA, supports "fair pay" for new teachers and says he recognizes their need for opportunities to transfer and change, to get training, and to maintain communication with the district. So far, it shows. The Bellevue district and BEA have bargained Nebraska's highest starting teacher salary, a $4,000 annual "professional stipend" for personal use, and an August paycheck for financially pressed new hires. Moreover, the district provides a mentor to every arriving teacher (regardless of past experience), provides all necessary classroom supplies, and shields new hires from mandatory, time-consuming committee work.

**Brad Wellmann** has recruited special education teacher **April Jensen** (far left) and first-grade teacher **Cindy Hudson** as building reps in his school.


Period 4
Periods 2, 3, & 7
turn in Animal Farm books per 2
Nathan Tom
Mike Vieira
Krystal Hirko
If you have a book checked out from my bookshelf please return it if you are not currently reading it
2&3
7th
begin Winter Thunder
E.D. quiz Friday
come prepared with essay topic
understand author's setting info of Winter Thunder
Review narrative writing skills by assessing an essay.
W.O.D. #3
2&3
7th
Intro. to Winter Thunder
review narrative essay writing skills

Meticulously organized: **Wendy Grojean** runs through the day's agenda.

## Classroom Victories

The benefits have been evident for Grojean and Wellmann as they've navigated their way through the classrooms of Nebraska's third largest school district. Observe these young educators and the first thing you'll notice is meticulous organization of everything from their classroom set-up to the way they guide students from one activity through another. Theirs is a world of binders, folders, checked-off daily agendas, multiple handwritten drafts, and just the right words to keep everybody on track—be it a "nicely done" for Grojean's high schoolers or a simple "good job" for Wellmann's fourth-graders.

It's also an atmosphere with high expectations, mutual trust, and the common understanding that students can be teachers, too. This new generation of teachers, after all, was groomed to learn by doing—often in collaboration—rather than by simply observing a lecturer.

In Grojean's freshman English classes at Bellevue East, students don't just read and analyze *Great Expectations*. They also break up into groups, research aspects of the Victorian Era (such as its brutal penal system), and teach each other what they've learned with Microsoft PowerPoint. The teacher's goal: Hold students accountable to peers as "subject experts," get them to take homework seriously, and get them excited about what they're learning.

Above all else, Grojean aims to prepare her freshmen for "their later years of high school and the real world," and to teach them accountability. "That requires me to be very organized, on top of things," she says.

In his class at Fort Crook Elementary, Wellmann also instills "self-organization" in students, through devices such as a take-home binder containing the week's important papers. "That way, kids will always have something they can practice on," he explains. And when this soft-spoken teacher's not reminding early test-finishers to "read your personal book," he's modeling civil behavior. "Kimi, make sure your voice is soft," he'll whisper to a loud talker.

And, like Grojean, Wellmann seeks ways to engage his kids in their own learning, like turning exercises from a language arts book into a *Jeopardy!* game, with eager teams of kids waging money on categories— "Abbreviated and compound nouns for $800!"—and everybody scrutinizing everybody else's answers and reasoning.

"Brad's doing a bang-up job in the classroom," says

PHOTOS: EARL RICHARDSON

fifth-grade teacher Lois Dalton, who mentored Wellmann in his first year. "He's very organized, the parents seem to like him, and the kids love him—he could have mentored me!" jokes the 26-year vet. "And I've noticed this organization with a couple of other new teachers in our school. They're great with discipline, they're on top of things, and they're very well-prepared."

## New Teachers as New Leaders

But such successes, say local Association leaders, can only continue if newer Bellevue teachers—and fellow newbies everywhere—start assuming leadership roles like Grojean and Wellmann. "We're trying to train new [activists] as we veterans leave the profession," says BEA Treasurer Yvonne Goodman, a 26-year English teacher at Bellevue West Senior High. "We need to make sure this union remains viable."

But BEA shouldn't have a problem.

Bellevue has plenty of enthusiastic new teachers, and "strong Association leaders are generally good teachers—risk-takers who are willing to go the extra mile," observes BEA President Julee Boeshart, a 14-year English teacher at Bellevue East.

And better yet, adds NSEA UniServ Director Jackee Wise, BEA has "lots of strong leaders who share the work, support and protect one another, and allow newer folks to feel comfortable."

And that, she says, is what a union is all about. nea

## Nuggets for Newbies: What They Don't Teach You in College

How can brand-new educators survive and thrive? Some suggestions from young Nebraska Association leaders who were in those shoes not so long ago:

**FIND SOME BALANCE.** After four years of teaching eighth-grade pre-algebra and language arts in Millard, Molly Erickson has learned to ease up and smell the roses. "Remember, you're there for the kids—they're your best reward and the reason you're there," she reminds newbies. "Don't get wrapped up in the stress of events, of grading, and find a sense of balance. Don't work until 6 each night and take your work home; find some balance, some time for yourself. And establish classroom rules at the beginning—be fair, firm, and consistent. And if you have questions about discipline, talk to the administration; let them know where you're at."

**FIND THE REAL YOU.** "Take a while to find yourself in the classroom; life becomes easier," says Bellevue high school English teacher Wendy Grojean. "To keep up your enthusiasm, change something—your curriculum or your grade level. If you're young-looking, dress professionally and let students know from the get-go that you won't tolerate disrespect, improper behavior, or inappropriate questions about your social life."

**THINK BEFORE YOU ASK.** New teachers nowadays tend to be more assertive and ask more questions than the vets. So Carrie Sheppard, who teaches English at Battle Creek (Nebraska) Elementary, warns new educators to "learn whom to ask, and when to ask for it—it takes time to learn." But never, she adds, "be afraid to ask questions about the Association. Another person will have the same questions."

**BELIEVE IN YOURSELF.** Some vets assume that new teachers are unrealistic, idealistic, and don't have the mileage to know what they're doing. "People my age sometimes feel intimidated by vets," says Jerad Wulf, an elementary behavior disorder teacher in South Sioux City. "To be credible, you've got to let people know what you know. Let them know you're confident in your abilities, that you were were hired for a reason, and that you are an expert in your position. In fact, other teachers ask me for advice on dealing with difficult children."

**STRETCH YOURSELF.** Newer teachers should change teaching methods and classroom organization a little bit at a time—and gather a variety of experiences, advises Bellevue fourth-grade teacher Brad Wellmann. "Your kids aren't the same year after year," he notes, "so how can you be a quality teacher if you stay the same?" Wellmann has avoided landing in a fourth-grade "rut" by teaching younger kids in summer school and working with school "spirit team" members of different ages. "I don't feel I get burned out as much," he finds, "and I know more people in the building just because I'm involved in more pieces of education."

For teaching resources and information about NEA's Student Program, go to www.nea.org/student-program.

**Molly Erickson** advises new teachers to not "get wrapped up in the stress of events" and to find some balance in their lives.

# SPRING cleaning

**Spring is here, and yard and home projects beckon. Never fear. These job-tested tips from your ESP colleagues will have you painting and caulking like a pro, busting through the clutter, and discovering your inner gardener.**

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY AND JOHN O'NEIL

PHOTOS: BRIAN TIETZ (TAYLOR); JOHN RISTOW (CAULFIELD)

## Leaving Beige Behind

Twenty-seven years ago, Diane Caulfield got a desk job in the Broward County School District. Boooring! Not long after, she transferred to the "touch-up truck"—where she first wet her paint brush.

These days, she still makes her mark during the United Way's "Day of Caring," when volunteers paint Spartans and dragons in school corridors, but she has been a night supervisor of painters, plumbers, and others for almost a decade. With 250 schools, it's a constant challenge to manage the demands put on her teams.

Painting is fun, even if the school palette is limited to mostly high-gloss beige. "I tell the principals, 'Martha Stewart does not work here,' but it is clean," she says.

If you're looking to spruce up your digs without spending a lot of dough, head for the brushes and paint chips, Caulfield advises. "For little money, you can make your house look completely different."

Her tips:

**IN SMALL ROOMS,** stay away from dark colors and keep ceilings light. Choose a few compatible colors and stick with them throughout the house.

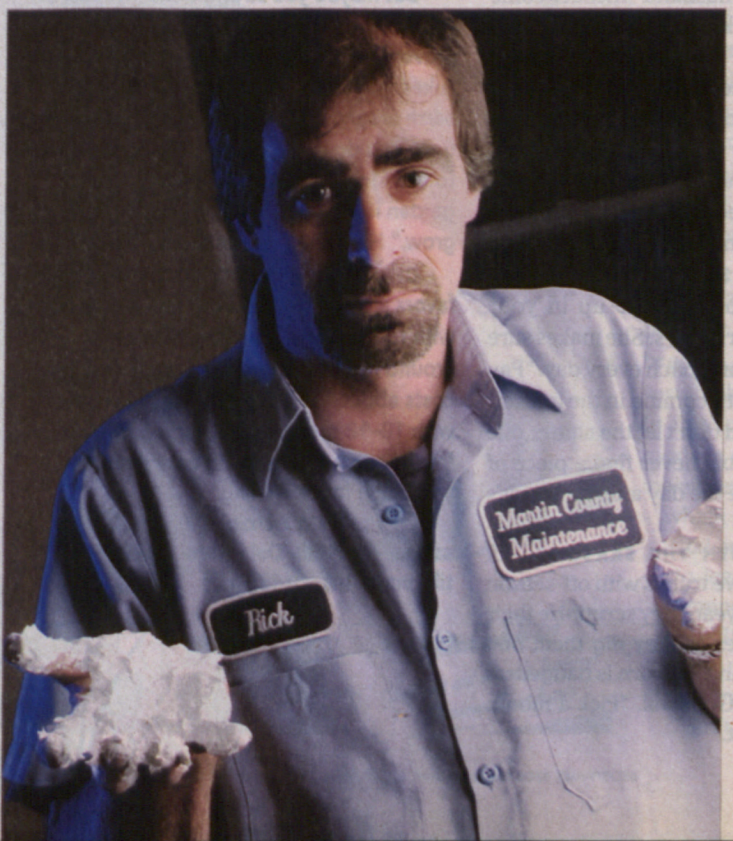
**DO THE PREP WORK!** Sure, it's a pain, but proper caulking and drywall patching really makes the final product look professional.

**TRY OUT FAUX FINISHES.** They look fancy, but products in home-improvement stores make them easy for amateurs. Caulfield's favorites: Paper grocery bags dipped in suede paint for a rich leathery look or tissue paper with mother-of-pearl paint for a dressy look. Or buy the "whoops"—the discounted colors at Home Depot—and mix with a glaze for a cheap change.

## Wonder Gunk

Carpenter Rick Taylor uses several hundred tubes of caulk each year in his job for the Martin County Public Schools in Inez, Kentucky, so trust him to recognize great gunk when he sees it.

"Caulking does wonders," says Taylor. "It makes the bath look nice and clean, and it definitely pays you back in the long run" because a tight seal around your windows blocks drafts, saving you big bucks on your heating and cooling bills.




The caulk section of your local home improvement store has more choices than ever—different colors and types designed for indoor and outdoor applications. "Don't just grab the cheapest one," Taylor urges; buy the caulk that matches your job. His tips for caulking like a pro:

**TO GET READY,** strip out any existing caulk and make sure the surface is clean and dry. Assemble your tools and materials: a caulk gun, sharp scissors or carpet-cutting tool, a wet rag and some paper towels, and a tube or two of your caulk of choice. Carefully cut the tip of the caulk off at an angle, making sure not to cut off too much of the tip. (The tip may have measurements based on the size of the crack you're filling.) Load the caulk into the caulk gun, and you're ready to apply.

**BEGIN SQUEEZING** the trigger of the caulk gun slowly at the edge of the crack—don't squeeze too hard or too fast. ("That's 80 percent of everyone's problem," says Taylor. "They squeeze too hard and it winds up on the floor or on their shoes.") If the caulk shoots out too fast, pull back the rod in the rear of the caulk gun and wipe away the excess.

**ONCE YOU'VE APPLIED ENOUGH** caulk to fill the crack, it's time for the finishing touches. Dampen your finger and press it softly along your caulk line, smoothing it the length of the crack, and wipe off any excess on a paper towel. Use your wet rag to wipe any remaining excess caulk above and under your finished line. There, doesn't that look great?

## Clutter-Buster

School secretary Shirley Kirkland admits she leans a little toward Felix Unger. Twice a month, she goes through every one of the 624 student folders at James McHenry Elementary School, her sharp eyes out for a missing form or an expired piece of paperwork. And while multitasking through the day, she still keeps her work space tidy.

To succeed as a secretary, "You have to be organized—that's a must," Kirkland advises. "And you can't focus in clutter."

It's no different at her home, where Kirkland emphasizes that "you could live in my garage, easily. Everything is in its place."

Could you swap out the Oscar Madison in you for a little Felix? Kirkland's recipe for conquering the clutter:

**MAKE IT A FAMILY AFFAIR.** Kirkland's son Michael Jr. (16 years old) and daughter Rashawn (14) have big roles to play keeping the house picked up. They're responsible for having homework done and chores completed each day before Shirley and her husband Michael come home from work. Weekly assignments are made each Friday on Family Night, when they munch pizza, play a board game, and troubleshoot household issues. Saturday is "cleaning day"—but the actual cleaning isn't onerous, because the kids have been tidying, vacuuming, and clutter-busting all week.

**SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF.** Do junk mail and newspapers pile up in your house? Not at Kirkland's. She makes sure to screen, scan, and pitch every day. "Pay attention to what's coming in the house," she advises, "and don't let the clutter pile up. You'll probably never find a piece of mail at my house the day after, unless it's a bill."

**CHANGE WITH THE SEASONS.** All the Kirklands have trunks with off-season clothes. Twice a year, they scrutinize their clothes and shoes as they dig them out. Anything that can't be worn is bagged up for a shelter or Goodwill. "Pick a month out and stick to it."

## Raking It In

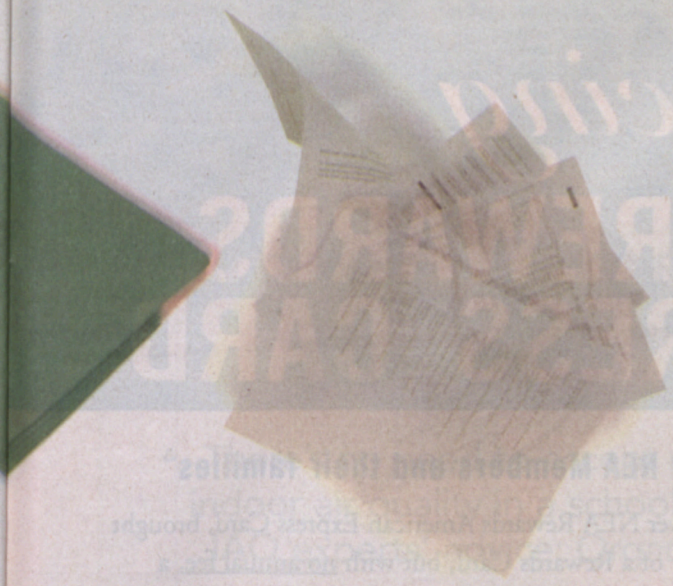
Sometimes people ask Michael Del Priore—"Don't you get tired of raking?" Well, yeah, sure he does! But when Salisbury High School's Falcons are scheduled to play ball on a rainy day in eastern Pennsylvania, nothing but hours and hours of patient raking will get the infield ready.

At home, Del Priore wields a rake toward a different end: tending a lush backyard featuring 20 fruit trees and a vast vegetable garden. Colleagues can attest to his rakesmanship—come July, you can't visit Del Priore's house without taking away a bushel of plums, and his coworkers regularly relish his gifts of sweet peppers and fresh spinach.

But maybe you struggle with weeds, or your tomatoes look weak. Grab a rake! To prevent weeds and nourish your cukes and zukes, you need to constantly move the earth around. "Like you do with the baseball field, you do in the garden, so oxygen gets to the roots," advises Del Priore. "If your garden is hard like concrete, nothing will grow." His tips for green thumb wannabes:

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOL.** Del Priore favors a garden rake about five inches wide, with four prongs, for tilling the earth around rows of flowers and veggies. His costs about $15. A common garden rake with 10–12 prongs gets the nod for raking lots of earth or grooming bare spots on your lawn for reseeding.

**MIX IN THE GOOD STUFF.** Each fall, Del Priore tills under his garden and



rakes in compost or cow manure. The organic material cooks away all winter and is fertile ground for flowers or veggies come spring.

**GET INTO THE ZEN.** Raking, admittedly, is a chore, so Del Priore practices mind over matter. "I pretend when I'm on a baseball field that it's my garden," he says. "I rake it and cut it and manicure the place." Play ball!

## Air-Master

Mike Shanteler got most of his HVAC training in the U.S. Marines, making sure satellite and radio equipment used in the Gulf War remained cool and operational. Now his tasks seem a little more mundane—a principal feels hot under the collar or a box of burgers is defrosting in the school's freezer—but no less vital to educators and students in Redlands, California.

Even as international relations seem not to have evolved much since Shanteler's combat tour, the world of school heating and air-conditioning has. Educators understand the link between the air they breathe, and the results they achieve. In his classrooms, modern technology measures air quality, which can affect a student's readiness to learn, not just temperature.

If your heating or air conditioning system isn't operating efficiently, the problem may start with your filter. You're changing them regularly, right?

"I get to houses where people say their system isn't working right and I open it up and say, 'Look at this!'" Shanteler exclaims. Filthy air filters are "the number-one cause of equipment malfunction."

The remedy? Change them, soldiers! It's simple, it's cheap, and it'll effectively extend the life of your system by easing air flow, said Shanteler, who also has owned a residential repair business. His tips:

**SIZE THINGS UP.** You'll usually find your filter at the return air grille or the fan air unit. Once you've found it, take note of the measurements and you're ready to buy a replacement.

**PONY UP A LITTLE MORE DOUGH.** Disposable "bottle cap" filters are cheap, but they won't trap small particles of dust, including animal dander and insect parts. One-inch pleated filters are better, and you may want to consider more expensive electrostatic filters.

**GET INTO THE HABIT.** Changing the filters should be part of your home maintenance routine. Common filters should be replaced monthly for a unit that runs continuously; other types less often.

**PLAY IT SAFE.** Don't forget to turn off your HVAC unit when changing the filter, because if the unit starts up before you get the new filter in, it could suck your grocery list or candy wrapper right into the motor. Not pretty. nea

PHOTOS: DANNY PECK (KIRKLAND); STACY EDMONDS (DEL PRIORE); LARRY ROSE (SHANTELER)

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# Scared, Lonely, and Sick?

## There's no need to accept poor indoor air quality in a school. The IAQ experts' advice: Organize!

Given just five minutes to list workplace health and safety hazards they face each day, NEA activists from 26 states quickly filled five, large sheets of poster paper. First came the *obvious* culprits: mold, pesticides, diesel exhaust particulates, and classroom overcrowding. Then came the *obscene:* rat, bat, and pigeon droppings; landfill methane gas; antifreeze in school water; and even uranium tailings (near Utah schools).

These teachers, education support professionals (ESPs), and Association staffers had gathered in Washington, D.C., to share experiences and prepare for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) December Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Symposium.

The symposium focused on how to beef up labor-management cooperation, community outreach, and student involvement to clean up indoor air quality (IAQ) in America's schools.

But NEA's "pre-symposium" zeroed in on one key piece of IAQ strategy overlooked by the three-day EPA event: what educators must do when administration cooperation just doesn't exist. Meeting participants got solid advice on that score from four seasoned UniServ reps, an industrial hygienist, an environmental law expert, a federal administrative judge, and Claire Barnett, executive director of the nonprofit Healthy Schools Network (www.healthyschools.org).

"Every cent of deferred school maintenance will come back to haunt you," Barnett warned the Association activists. "Think creatively how to build bridges to parents and to environmental, public health, and other organizations in your community. Your building is not just about you, but about everybody else in the community."

In the daylong session, teachers and ESPs mapped out the IAQ hazards of a "typical" school. One five-state group sketched a building with sealed windows, flat roofs, cockroach and mice feces, poor temperature control, and an HVAC system full of water and mold.

Then there was another, even more sinister hazard. Too many school employees "fear they'll put their jobs in jeopardy if they speak out over health and safety," said Anne Marie Abercrombie, a fifth-grade teacher in Elizabeth, New Jersey. "We do have a voice and we have a right to be involved in this issue."

Often school employees "don't want to admit they are vulnerable to an IAQ problem," pointed out Washington State UniServ rep Art Busch. "People are scared, lonely, and sick."

No expert speaker could cite a current law or standard that has the teeth to solve IAQ problems. The best official route available: Build on existing statutes, enforce building codes, and cultivate relationships with government environmental specialists who can offer technical advice.

As a smarter route, experts advised IAQ campaigners to:

**ORGANIZE IAQ RESOURCES.** New Jersey UniServ reps Norm Danzig and John Ropars recommended that activists research IAQ issues on the Web, document school problems, network with parents and occupational health coalitions (found at www.coshnetwork.org), negotiate strong contractual health and safety language, and build both union and joint labor-management health and safety committees.

**ORGANIZE SCHOOL EMPLOYEES.** Indiana UniServ rep Art Henderlong urged budding activists to "form your own local affiliate IAQ team with leaders willing to say things publicly." From there, get "willing volunteers," ask school nurses how many kids get sick, and survey teachers and ESPs about IAQ symptoms.

"Take digital pictures, gather resources, and bring in key community stakeholders," Henderlong added.

**ORGANIZE FOR THE LONG HAUL.** "Expect resistance, but be persistent," stressed Diane Murray, a high school nurse in Beaufort County, South Carolina. "Network, collect business cards, and don't be afraid to ask questions."

The payoff for Association persistence in Beaufort: a labor-management program that has put IAQ teams and "green" cleaning products in every building, pulled out school carpeting, and created a uniform IAQ complaint procedure with a 24-hour response time.

For the district, that has meant a decrease in costly workers' compensation claims. And all this without an IAQ law or a union contract. Say activists, that's the power of organization.

—DAVE WINANS

**FOR MORE** on air quality, go to http://neahin.org/programs/environmental/iaq.htm or contact NEA Health Information Network staffer Jennie Young at jyoung@nea.org.

ILLUSTRATION: IMAGE ZOO

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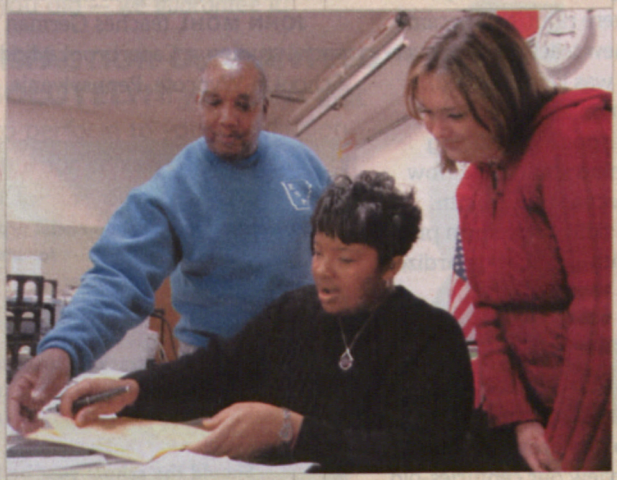
# Sign 'Em Up!

## In Arkansas, a gutsy custodian tells what it takes to bargain a solid agreement for support professionals—against the odds.

You'll always encounter a warm welcome behind the double doors of the head custodian's office at Camden-Fairview (Arkansas) Intermediate School. There, Charles Moore will invite you to help yourself to free Association materials. And if you're not a member, he'll sign you up on the spot.



Head custodian **Charles Moore** (left) signs up new teachers **Devonda Brownlee** (center) and **Breanna Heim** as Association members.

In fact, Moore is so passionate about unity, employee rights, and workplace respect that he often drives from his home base in south-central Arkansas to recruit non-members elsewhere—secretaries, nurses, and yes, even the cream of the teaching profession.

Recently Moore signed up a regional Teacher of the Year, and after he outlined the benefits of membership, the accomplished educator conceded, "I didn't know that!"

It's a refrain he's heard many times before. "That's the first thing non-members say," says Moore, who chairs the Arkansas Education Association's (AEA) ESP Advisory Committee. In that activist role, Moore has figured out that member recruitment involves one-on-one contact—not to mention lots of testifying about the "power of numbers." And in a "right-to-work" state like Arkansas, where bargaining is not top on the list of favorite things to do, testifying and inspiring people to organize can be a challenge.

But Moore and other leaders of the high-membership Camden-Fairview Education Association (CFEA) are writing the book on how to do it well. Here are a few of their secrets.

**ON BARGAINING WITHOUT A LAW:** Politically active CFEA members say they focus always on re-electing an enlightened school board that doesn't equate collective bargaining with domestic terrorism. Last summer, the district negotiated a first-time ESP agreement with CFEA's Classified Personnel Policy Committee, chaired by full-time mentor Irene Galbert.

The pact provided a $1,000 increase for paraeducators who pass the ParaPro written test for No Child Left Behind certification. It also included a job re-evaluation study that moved all workers up by 3 percent, a new salary scale giving some ESPs as much as a 15 percent raise, and financial assistance for paras seeking college degrees.

"You can do this when you're unified and have big numbers, go as an 'informed group' to your district, and let them know you *know* what you're talking about," says Moore, a classified policy committee member. AEA headquarters, he notes, armed CFEA with good data on state resources on its way to the district, heading off a school board poverty plea.

**ON TEACHER-ESP UNITY:** CFEA's fast-growing teacher unit, led by local President Ida Tramble, helped make the ESP deal happen. In fact, Tramble "not only listened to the 'classified' people, she really reached out to us," Moore stresses. "A lot of this [organizing] energy comes from her."

Indeed, Camden-Fairview's a place where teachers and ESPs recognize each others' educational roles and needs. Moore, who signs up new teachers as he helps them set up their classrooms, stresses that novice educators "need comforting and peer mentoring" to succeed in the "very hard work" of teaching.

And this head custodian—who greets arriving students each morning, invites them to his lunch table, and runs a Pizza Club for kids with great attitudes—says that if an ESP can "give a kid a great attitude, his grades will go up, because he feels good about himself."

**ON DEVELOPING LEADERS:** CFEA members say they put a lot of energy into grooming emerging leaders—such as paraeducators-turned-recruiters Taurus Fletcher and Cynthia Patton—and Moore knows their value better than most.

He served three years in the Vietnam War, labored 20 years in a unionized Milwaukee manufacturing plant, and finally returned home to Arkansas to start life over as a manager in Wal-Mart. What he's learned since leaving that anti-union company, he says, is that "workers will work harder and feel better about themselves if they have a voice and feel they're part of decision-making."

At CFEA, leaders say they try to empower members. It's a noble goal for any NEA affiliate, says Jon White, AEA's associate executive director.

"All it takes," White notes, "is people doing for themselves, being bold, and saying, 'This is what we *need* to do a better job for kids.'"

—DAVE WINANS

**More ESP stories in this issue:**


- **Montana affiliate has course to "qualify" paras for law – *Page 14***
- **ESPs share advice on tackling tasks at home – *Page 40***
- **Writing better job descriptions for paras – *Page 58***


PHOTO: DAVID STOUT

# Is retention better than social promotion for students?

## YES

When I first called on "Brendan," a recent transfer to the district, to read, he refused. His homework was copied from a friend if done at all, and he failed to comprehend a passage after fumbling over words when I finally got him to read aloud. Despite his third-grade reading level, Brendan was allowed into eighth grade. He was a product of social promotion.

Social promotion has three detrimental effects on the education system. It taxes both teachers and students. Promoting a student into a higher level of English when he lacks basic reading skills, as was the case with Brendan, places undue burden on future teachers and students. Socially promoted students monopolize teacher attention, and other students' learning opportunities are limited as a result.

Second, it sends a message to students that they can move on to the next level even if they lack the required knowledge or effort. I once taught a summer school class with two particularly unruly students who were unfazed by the threat of being held back for failing. They knew they'd be eighth graders regardless of their performance. They were right, and became burdens to their new teachers (that oversight, fortunately, was later rectified).

Social promotion also distances schools from their goals of fulfilling No Child Left Behind standards. How can anybody expect a student with elementary math skills to perform proficiently on an eighth-grade standardized math exam?

Some argue that social promotion maintains the self-esteem of low-achieving students. I agree that humanism should be an important component in our teaching. But the "real world" has neither time nor regard for making sure every person feels worthwhile. Teachers have the responsibility to introduce, to some degree, the benefits of making the mark and the consequences of not doing so. Truth be told, I'd rather see Brendan held back in eighth than held back in life.

**JOHN MOHL** teaches German and social studies at Cedarbrook Middle School in Wyncote, Pennsylvania.

### WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

**Is retention better than social promotion for students?**
To vote, visit our Web site at www.nea.org/neatoday and see the results instantly.

**Should tracking be abolished?**
The tally on this *NEA Today* Debate question:
40% Yes 60% No

**Should the school year be longer?**
If you'd like to take part in this future Debate, send a brief note to Alain Jehlen, ajehlen@nea.org.

## NO

Each year, we all have a "Brendan" or two and we are frustrated and angry that he advanced with such evident skill deficiencies. But would Brendan be helped by retention, the traditional solution for struggling students?

Social promotion by itself is not a good practice. Retention does not, however, solve the problems of low-achieving students. Research shows that retained students do not improve their academic performance compared with similar counterparts who were promoted, and retained students struggle with self-esteem.

Social promotion isn't the answer if it means we send students on to the next grade ill-prepared for the workload. "Brendan" is failing, but so are we as educators if we don't provide the help he needs to keep up with his peers. So let's provide that help.

Is it time to review our centuries-old system of grouping students by age? Perhaps all students should be placed in multi-age classrooms. This arrangement would assist students who struggle to learn as quickly as their peers of the same age and would eliminate self-esteem issues caused by retention.

Another approach: Instead of retaining a student, why don't we promote struggling students with an individualized education plan (as we do for our special education students) to help them catch up to their peers? Most struggling students who are promoted do not meet the requirements for special education but they do need assistance that, unfortunately, we are not mandated to provide.

Maybe it's time to get serious about early intervention and provide funding for programs for struggling students *before* they reach middle and high school.

Our choices should not be just promoting students versus retaining them.

Passing struggling students to the next grade is a failure of the system if we don't have a plan to help them catch up. But retention isn't the answer, either.

**JENNIFER SLIFER** teaches sixth-grade language arts at Thomas Edison Magnet Middle School in Meriden, Connecticut.

ILLUSTRATION: TED PITTS

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# Planning For 'Pomp'

## College costs are rising fast, but tax-advantaged savings plans can help buffer the sticker shock.

BY MARY ROWLAND

It's 2027, and little Janie is strutting down the lawn at State U to the strains of "Pomp and Circumstance."

Well, maybe.

Janie and her friends, all born this year, are due to invade the freshmen dorms in 2023 and will likely face college costs approaching $100,000 for a four-year education at a public institution and far more at private colleges. With college costs outpacing inflation most years, anyone with a little Janie at home can't hear it too many times: Think seriously about starting (or beefing up) a college savings fund.

Fortunately, several tax-advantaged investments have been introduced over the past decade to help families cope with rising costs. The best of them is probably the so-called "529" plan, named for Section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code. The 529 plan is a tax-advantaged college savings account available in every state. Money you put into the plan grows tax-deferred, and withdrawals to pay for college expenses come out free of federal tax (at least until 2010—after that, distributions will be taxed at the student's tax rate unless Congress extends the benefit). The tax savings, combined with the power of compounding interest earned on the investments, give your college fund a better chance at keeping up with rising tuition and fees. (Although, as always, nothing is guaranteed in investing!)

The 529 plans have several advantages over older college savings vehicles. There is no income limit on contributors to a 529 account. The amount you can put in is substantial—exceeding $200,000 in some states. You remain in control of the account, and there are no age limits. Your child could use it for graduate school—or you could even withdraw the money to fund continuing education for yourself. The money need not be spent by any particular deadline, and you need not send your child to any particular school.

Unlike the Uniform Gift to Minors Accounts (UGMA) and the Uniform Transfer to Minors Accounts (UTMA), where your child gains control of the money at the age of majority, 529 plans allow the donor to decide when money will be taken out and for what purpose. In most cases, you could even take the money back or transfer it to another beneficiary, although you must pay tax and a 10-percent penalty if you do not use the money for education.

Although you need not invest in your own state's plan, there may be an advantage to doing so if you live in a high-tax state that provides you with a tax break.

With all these benefits, what's the downside? Chief among them is widely varying fees. Some of the vendors chosen by states provide very low-cost plans. Others charge 529 plan participants higher fees, which erode your return on investment—and may leave Janie and her classmates a few books or courses shy.

One other college savings option deserves mention. A Coverdell Education Savings Account, with a non-deductible contribution limit of $2,000 a year, also helps you save for college, with earnings growing tax free. Money goes to the child beneficiary whether or not he or she uses it for college, and it must be used by the time the child is 30. Money is free from federal tax when withdrawn for education. To receive a full deduction, the taxpayer must have modified gross income of no more than $190,000 for a couple or $95,000 for a single.

One pitfall: record keeping for the Coverdell can be substantial. The IRS estimates a time of more than six hours to read instructions and figure out filing. There is also a penalty for "double dipping" or using Coverdell withdrawals at the same time a student claims a Hope or Lifetime Learning Credit. Finally, if your account remains small, fees will likely to eat up much of the proceeds.

**OUR BEST ADVICE:** Take the time to shop for a 529 plan. An excellent source for comparing 529 plans is the Web site www.savingforcollege.com. As you compare plans, make sure you understand the fees and investigate the performance of the investment option you choose. An automatic monthly withdrawal from a paycheck or savings account can make this a nearly painless way to conquer rising college costs.

### Annual Cost of College

Average Student Expenses, 2003–04

| | |
|---|---|
| **Public (in-state):** | **$11,453** |
| **Public (out-of-state):** | **$18,499** |
| **Private:** | **$26,469** |

SOURCE: ANNUAL SURVEY OF COLLEGES, THE COLLEGE BOARD, NEW YORK, NY



PHOTO COLLAGE: COMSTOCK IMAGES

## Bye Bye Clunker

**THIS YEAR,** you might hear fewer of those radio jingles asking you to donate your old clunker to charity in exchange for a tax deduction. That's because, as of January 1, 2005, the IRS has imposed strict new limits on the amount you may deduct when you donate your used car.

Over the past few years, increasing numbers of charities raised money through car donations, pitching the ease with which you can get rid of your aging ride—and the tax deduction you'll gain. Until December 31, 2004, you could deduct the fair market value of the car. If the value was more than $5,000, you needed an appraisal. If the value was $5,000 or less, the rules required only an estimate of value, based on a chat with a used-car dealer or a Web site like Kelley Blue Book (www.kbb.com).

But beginning in January 2005, the taxpayer is limited to deducting the price that the charity receives when it sells your old car. That might not be much. Many charities use middlemen to pick up, spruce up, and auction off the cars, looking for a quick turnaround rather than top dollar.

Donating your car to a worthy charity is fine—as long as you don't harbor unrealistic ideas about the tax break. Stay informed and you won't be taken for a ride at tax time.

# Don't Play With Fire

**Insuring your crib makes sense—even if you rent.**

A friend returned to her apartment one recent afternoon to find the hallway filled with smoke. One of her neighbor's apartments had been practically gutted by a fire. Her own apartment seemed intact. Sort of. A fine soot covered books, pictures, bed, couch, and stove. In short, everything.

My friend's next-door neighbor called her renter's insurance company. The insurer sent workers right over to clean and scrub the apartment, to send sweaters and drapes out to the dry cleaners, shampoo carpets, and arrange for the insured tenant to stay in a hotel until the apartment was clean and ready. My friend, who had no renter's insurance, spent the next three months at her mother-in-law's house with breaks on the weekends to clean up her damaged apartment.

**THE MORAL?** Anyone who rents an apartment or house needs renter's insurance. Even more important than covering the contents, the insurance provides liability coverage. That means if someone trips on your rug and sues you, the insurer will cover damages up to the limit on your policy.

**WHEN SHOPPING FOR A POLICY,** look for one that would cover the contents of your apartment and provide at least $100,000 in liability coverage. Such a policy is relatively inexpensive, perhaps around $300 a year.

**ONE POINT TO CONSIDER** is whether you should choose coverage for replacement value or appraised value of your possessions. Replacement value costs more—if an item were destroyed, the insurer would pay to replace it. Appraised value coverage means you'll be reimbursed only for the appraised value of the damaged item. So the insurance check for your battered old couch won't pay for a new one.

www.neamb.com

## Climbing Out of Debt

**When you buy a car or take out a mortgage on a home, you have a specified time to repay the debt, perhaps five years for a car and 30 years for a mortgage. But credit card debt has no term limit, and that presents a real challenge for those of us who charge beyond our means. Simply put: If you pay the minimum amount each month, you will be in debt for eternity.**

**The only way to get out of credit card debt is to pay off more than the monthly minimums, says Marc Eisenson, the author of several books including *Invest in Yourself* (Wiley 1998). Some of his tips for climbing out of credit card debt:**

**DECLARE A ONE-MONTH FREEZE** on using your credit card for discretionary purchases. Don't open your wallet unless you have to pay the plumber, the car repair shop, or someone else essential to your daily living.

**TAKE A LOOK AT THE TERMS** on each of your credit cards. Pick the two with the lowest interest rate, no annual fee, and the longest grace period (the time that you are allowed to make a payment before interest is charged). Put the others into a drawer (or, better yet, cut them up).

**PUT ONE OF THE LOW-INTEREST** cards in your wallet to be used for emergencies only.

**FIGURE OUT HOW MUCH** you can afford to pay on credit card debt every month. Stretch a bit. Let's say it's $300. Pick the card with the highest interest rate. Pay the minimum payment on the others and put the rest of your credit card budget on the highest rate card. When you pay off that card, close the account and focus on the next highest rate card.

**WHEN YOU'VE PAID OFF** the cards and closed the accounts, continue to use your two remaining cards sparingly. Pay off the balances each month.

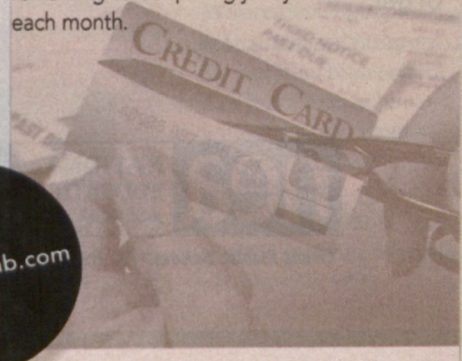


PHOTO TOP: IMAGE 100; PHOTO MIDDLE: JOHN A. RIZZO; PHOTO BOTTOM: DON FARRALL

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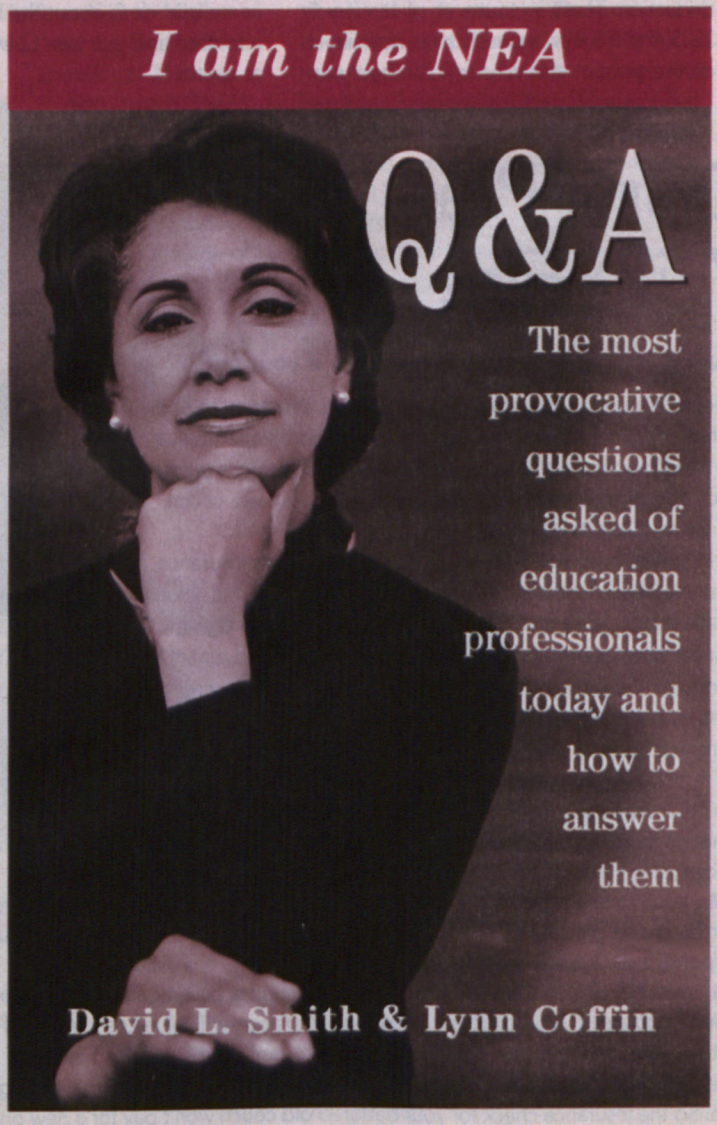
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# Fibs and Dogs

What was the lamest excuse you ever got for a missing homework assignment?

**ANSWER:** One of my third graders said he left his textbook in his mother's car, and the car was stolen by a carjacker. That could have been true, but a phone call confirmed it wasn't.

LORNA MAXWELL
*Newbury Park, California*

**ANSWER:** "I enjoyed the assignment so much I erased the entire thing and started to do it again, but I ran out of time."

JEFFREY HORNER
*High school English teacher*
*Minden, Nebraska*

**ANSWER:** We all have days that shouldn't happen to a dog and we don't have our homework. So I give my students three D.O.G. days: "Day Of Grace." A student without homework hands in a piece of paper with the word "dog" written on it. The next day, the student hands in the late homework or takes another dog day. I add one, two, or three points to the final grading period marks of students who haven't used their days.

I've used a few dog days myself. My planning period is canceled. The copying machine runs out of toner. The students are forgiving, but they remind me how many days I have left.

FRAN RANDLE
*Memphis, Tennessee*

## Elementary Artists

I am a grade 4–6 art teacher and will be starting an art club. Any ideas about activities and how it could be organized?

LORNA PEZANELLI, *Millbury, Massachusetts*

## High School Eaters

I am interested in teaching an elective science course in nutrition to high school juniors and seniors. Are there programs out there like that?

JUDD HULBERT
*High school science teacher,*
*LaMesa, California*

## Share your wisdom, ask your question!

**What's the most unnecessary PA system interruption you've suffered in the middle of class?**

Send your answers to these or other questions on this page to **ajehlen@nea.org.** Or, send us a question you'd like to see posted. Please include your name, your job, and the community and state where you work.

For a weekly e-mail of questions, answers, and practical classroom tips, join Works4Me, one of NEA's most popular and useful services. Just send the message "subscribe Works4Me" (without the quotation marks) to **Lyris@list.nea.org.**

There are more lame excuses and Matemáticas answers at www.nea.org/neatodayextra.

## Las Matemáticas

I teach English as a second language math to students in grades 6–8 who speak little English and are very weak in math. Ideas?

PAM LUCKENBAUGH
*Edison, New Jersey*

**ANSWER:** Spend half of your class on work that involves minimal language. For the remainder, focus on one word problem a day. Take a story approach: Use stick figures and diagrams, and talk your way through the problem.

For homework, assign language work based on that word problem (e.g., write a similar problem).

CLAIRE SMITH
*ESL/foreign languages teacher, Vancouver, Washington*

## Bio Boosting

We are developing a biotechnology program for our new high school. Are there high schools with similar programs that would be willing to share ideas?

MICHELLE DARTY
*Science teacher, Maryland*

TOP LEFT: IMAGE ZOO; TOP RIGHT: MARK PARISI; CENTER: CREATAS.COM; RIGHT: LEON ZERNITSKY; BOTTOM: HOOPLAH!

# Colorful Homecoming

*For artist Robt Seda-Schreiber, leaving California beaches for an eighth-grade classroom in New Jersey was an act of love... and a no-brainer.*

**TEACHER AND ARTIST** Robt Seda-Schreiber spends his days encouraging students to express themselves. At Melvin H. Kreps Middle School in East Windsor, New Jersey, his lessons line the hallways.

Colorful 10-by-6-foot murals painted by Seda-Schreiber's eighth-grade students cover many of the walls.

"The students have positively influenced their school," he says. "They've had an incredible response to their work. Hundreds of community members, including all four area mayors, have come to see it. It's been a wonderful experience, and we don't plan to stop until every inch of the school is covered!"

Seda-Schreiber never thought he'd be leaving a permanent mark on the school he once attended. "I love being back in my hometown. I have a lot of empathy for my students because I grew up here. It gives us an instant rapport."

Although he remembers drawing constantly as a child, it was his middle school art teacher who got him to take art seriously.

"She directed that energy I had," he says. "That's what art is about. It's not so much about natural talent. It's about passion." Seda-Schreiber's passion for teaching earned him the honor of being named East Windsor Regional School District's 2004 Teacher of the Year.

In addition to teaching art, Seda-Schreiber is active in the drama department and directed a series of one-act plays that won a Best Production award in a recent Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Secondary School Drama Festival. He also finds time to exhibit his own work in the community, winning numerous awards.

Ten years ago, Seda-Schreiber was teaching art to middle and high school students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder as part of a clinical study at the University of California at Berkeley when he got a call from his former art teacher about an opening at Kreps.

"I had a great life and a job I loved. I was living right off the beach," he says. "But I didn't hesitate for a second. I felt like I had to teach, to give back to a community that's given me so much."

—DESDA MOSS

PHOTOS: TAMIKA DIAZ

# Cycles of Love

*The death of her child forced Pennsylvania science teacher Elizabeth Sterling to redefine hope; now she's helping other kids survive cancer.*

**ELIZABETH STERLING'S LIFE** changed forever when she lost her son, Bennett, to brain cancer when he was just 18 months old.

The lessons she learned from his short life inspired Sterling to make a 3,200-mile cross-country bicycle journey last October as part of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Tour of Hope.

"I learned from my experience with my son that there are two types of hope: the kind you have when you hope things turn out the way you want them to, and the kind that helps you accept that no matter how things turn out, something good can come of it."

A high school biology and environmental studies teacher in the Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, school district, Sterling was one of 20 cyclists selected from nearly 1,200 applicants for the national team. The ride was organized to raise awareness about the importance of cancer clinical trials. Cancer survivor and six-time Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong joined the group for selected segments of the weeklong race.

"It was an incredible honor," says Sterling. "The other riders were such inspiring people. The thing we all had in common was our connection to clinical trials."

Bennett was only four months old when he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Like 40 percent of the children with cancer, he took part in clinical trials during his treatment.

One thing that kept Sterling going in her cross-country trek was having the names of 48 children emblazoned on her riding jersey. Sterling calls them her "cancer angels and cancer warriors" because some were battling the disease and others succumbed.

"Anytime I felt sorry for myself I thought of those kids," she says.

—D.M.

# Reclaiming Hope

*For 32 years, Helen Holloway put all her heart and energy into teaching social studies to middle schoolers. It didn't go unnoticed.*

**THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES** of the University of Central Arkansas recently endowed a $100,000 scholarship in Holloway's name to honor her commitment to education.

It was a fitting tribute to an educator who never stopped giving to the residents of De Valls Bluff, Arkansas, once she left the classroom. Eight years ago, Holloway founded her own after-school tutoring program at a local church, where she tutors between 15 and 22 students a year in language arts and social studies.

"The program used to be just me and the kids, but we're expanding," says Holloway. Just last year, she enlisted two other tutors, including her husband, Don, a former math teacher.

If that wasn't enough, Holloway also logs many hours volunteering at the Prairie County Hope Chest, which provides clothing and transportation to help De Valls Bluff residents moving from welfare to work. And she's the president of the Prairie County Retired Teachers Association, as well as a member of the Arkansas Education Association-Retired Advisory Board.

So does she ever plan to take time off for herself? "Absolutely," she insists. "I might use that extra time to do some traveling."

But she has no plans to give up her volunteering.

"I love it too much," Holloway says. "My father taught me to leave the world a better place than I found it, and I've believed that all my life."

—MATT SIMON

## GOT A TIP?

Do you have an interesting story idea? Contact Sabrina Holcomb, section editor, at **sholcomb@nea.org**

PHOTO TOP: TOUROFHOPE.ORG; BOTTOM: JEFF MCFARLAND

# resources


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## Friend of Education Award Nominations Due April 4

Nominations for the NEA Friend of Education Award are due on **April 4, 2005.** The Friend of Education Award is the Association's highest honor and may be bestowed on an individual or organization whose leadership acts or support have significantly benefited education, education employees, or students on a national scale.

Letters of nomination must include:

- name of the nominee
- nominee's position and/or organizational affiliation
- nominee's mailing address (or organization mailing address)
- name of the nominator or affiliate
- signature of nominator or affiliate officer
- name of nominator's local affiliate, if applicable
- nominator's mailing address and telephone number.

If the nominator is an NEA member, send proof of membership (such as an *NEA Today* mailing label with a membership number).

In 100 words or less, indicate the reason for your nomination and summarize the nominee's qualifications for the award. Nominees will be evaluated based on leadership, acts, and support of education on a national scale. Supporting materials, such as publications or videos, may be submitted along with the nomination information.

Submit all nomination materials to: NEA Friend of Education Award Committee; Executive Office; Attn: Carol Adams. National Education Association; 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036; You can also fax nomination information to 202-822-7012.

### IDEA OF AMERICA ESSAY CONTEST

High school juniors (ages 16–18) who are a citizen or permanent resident of the United States can enter the 2005 Idea of America Essay Contest. Sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the contest awards $5,000 to the author of the best essay and $1,000 to each of five runners-up. Essays should answer this year's questions: "Describe totalitarianism by comparing the goals, methods, and results of fascism and communism. How were the tenets of these totalitarian movements different from the ideals that unite Americans? How did the ideals embodied in the American founding prevail?"

All essays must be in English, no longer than 7,500 characters (approximately 1,200 words in length), and received by **April 15, 2005.** For more information, or to submit an essay online, go to www.wethepeople.gov/essay/.

### GRANTS FOR LESSONS PLANS

The Jordan Fundamentals Grant Program recognizes and rewards teachers and paraeducators in underprivileged schools who strive beyond challenges and limited resources to achieve excellence through instructional creativity, innovative teaching, and high learning expectation for students. Applicants must develop an original lesson plan or thematic unit that demonstrates high expectations for students. Four hundred grants of up to $2,500 each are awarded each year. To be eligible, you must:

- be a teacher or paraeducator working in grades 1–12
- work in an accredited public school where at least 50 percent of the student population is eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program.

The application deadline is **June 15, 2005.** For a complete application and more information, go to www.nike.com/nikebiz/nikebiz.jhtml?page=26&item=jordan.



ILLUSTRATIONS: PHOTODISC

## MATH & SCIENCE TEACHING AWARDS

The Presidential Awards for Mathematics and Science Teaching recognize outstanding mathematics and science teachers from across the United States for their contributions in the classroom and to their profession.

Mathematics and science teachers K–12 are eligible for the award. In even-numbered years, the award is given to elementary teachers (grades K–6); in odd-numbered years, secondary teachers (grades 7–12) are recognized. To be eligible, educators must:

- be teachers in one of the 50 states or four jurisdictions
- be full-time employees of their school districts
- have at least five years of mathematics and/or science teaching experience prior to application
- be assigned to teach math and/or science during the current year at a public or private school.

Teachers compete in either the mathematics or the science category. Awardees receive:

- a citation signed by the U.S. President
- a $10,000 award from the National Science Foundation
- a paid trip for two to Washington, D.C., to attend recognition events and professional development opportunities.

For more information, including further eligibility requirements, go to www.paemst.org.

## MINI-GRANTS FOR GOOD DEEDS

Pay It Forward Mini-Grants of up to $500 fund one-time-only service-oriented projects identified by youth as activities they would like to perform to benefit their school, neighborhood, or greater community. To be considered, projects must contain a "pay it forward" focus—that is, they must be based on the idea of one person doing a favor for others, who in turn do favors for others, with the results growing exponentially. Grant applications are reviewed by a Selection Committee three times a year.

When completing an application, explain the project thoroughly, include specific details about its educational value, and attach a clear and concise budget. Application deadlines are January 15, April 15, and October 15 of each year.

For more information and an application, go to www.payitforwardfoundation.org/ or send e-mail to info@payitforwardfoundation.com.

## TURNING PHONES INTO MONEY

The EcoPhones Drive is a cellular phone fund-raising and recycling program that pays organizations up to $100 for each used digital cell phone they turn in. No buying or selling is required to participate. EcoPhones provides a marketing kit to help launch community phone drives. Once you collect a full box of phones, EcoPhones will pick them up for free and send a check. For more, go to www.ecophones.com.

# Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits

**APPROACHING AGE 65 OR THINKING ABOUT RETIREMENT?**

Retired or soon-to-be retired NEA members need to plan ahead for their health care needs. The consumer guide, "Understanding Medicare and Medicare Supplement Insurance," has recently been updated to include information about the new Medicare Part D (prescription drug coverage) that will become available January 1, 2006. It also explains how Medicare Part D coordinates with the Medicare Supplement insurance you may already have or plan to purchase.

Request your copy of this useful guide by calling the NEA Member Benefits Member Service Center toll free at 1-800-637-4636 or download it online from www.neamb.com/lifeplan/cgms/cgmedsup.jsp. When you reach age 65 and sign up for Medicare Part B, be sure to select the NEA MemberCare® Medicare Supplement Program for your supplemental coverage—it's highly cost-competitive and designed exclusively for members!

**BRIDGE THE GAP—BEFORE YOU COME TO IT!**

Scenario: You bought a car two months ago for $25,000 but a tree falls on it. The insurance company determines the car is now worth $20,000—a frightening 20 percent reduction in value. That's where gap insurance can help; it covers the difference between your car's current assessed value and what you still owe the finance company.

If you lease a car, gap insurance is usually mandated by the contract or included in it. Check the lease to see if you have it, how much is offered, and how much it costs.

The NEA Members Auto & Home Insurance Program®, available through California Casualty, offers gap insurance with every automobile policy it sells.

To find out more, call 1-800-877-7345 or go online to www.neamb.com/insurance/aplus.jsp.

**MORE THAN 90,000 NEA MEMBERS VISIT WWW.NEAMB.COM EACH MONTH.**

# Take Note

## What Paraeducators Achieve

Of paraeducators who have a job description, 27 percent think it does not accurately describe what they do. One quarter of paras have no job description at all. To help remedy this situation, NEA ESP Quality offers *Results-Oriented Job Descriptions: How Paraeducators Help Students Achieve,* an online guide that outlines the process by which new results-oriented job descriptions (ROJDs) can be written to help paras achieve recognition of the vital roles they play. The ROJD does more than describe what a paraeducator does (the tasks). It describes what the paraeducator accomplishes (the results). To access this guide online, go to www.nea.org/esphome/nearesources/rojd-paras.html. For a printed copy, contact ESP Quality Program, Attention: Program Assistant, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036; 202-822-7131; ESP.Program@nea.org.

## Share Your Stories

The NEA Health Information Network (NEA HIN) is interested in hearing from NEA members who have been touched by cervical cancer. If you are willing to talk to us about your experience, we want to hear from you. Contact Emily Jadwin of NEA HIN at EJadwin@nea.org.


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## Trainers in LGBT Issues in Education

Students cannot learn where they do not feel safe and supported, but schools are too often unsafe for students who are different because of sexual orientation or gender identity. In a 2003 study of U.S. middle and high schools, 84 percent of students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) reported being verbally harassed, 39 percent reported being physically harassed, and 83 percent reported that school personnel failed to intervene. Taking a stand against bias can be difficult, but doing so is important: A 2004 poll indicated that 64 percent of boys and 80 percent of girls said they were likely to listen to a teacher they respected if the teacher told them to stop using anti-gay slurs.

To support state and local affiliates in providing trainings for school personnel on responding to bias and creating safe learning environments for all students, NEA Human and Civil Rights has created a 2004 Directory of Trainers on LGBT Issues in Education. This state-by-state directory lists over 900 individuals and organizations who are available to deliver workshops on LGBT issues in education, including their contact information, biographies, and workshop topics.

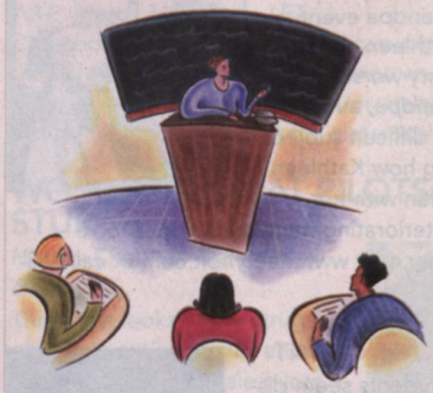
We encourage affiliates to assist schools in scheduling trainings on school safety. NEA has not screened, certified, or endorsed any of these trainers, so affiliates are encouraged to review credentials, references, and proposed workshop outlines before selecting trainers and are responsible for arranging and funding their own trainings. For more information, contact Kevin Kumashiro (kkumashiro@nea.org, 202-822-7439), Linda Bacon (lbacon@nea.org, 202-822-7724), or Al-Tony Gilmore (agilmore@nea.org, 202-822-7395).



ILLUSTRATIONS: PHOTODISC

## Helping the Next Generation of Educators

NEA-Retired offers the Jack Kinnaman Scholarship, which helps a deserving member of the NEA Student Program defray college costs. In the two years the scholarship has been offered, three outstanding young people committed to joining the teaching profession have gotten a helping hand. But to sustain the program, NEA-Retired needs contributions. If you can help, send donations to: NEA-Retired Jack Kinnaman Scholarship Fund, c/o NEA-Retired, 1201 16th St., N.W., Room 410, Washington, DC 20036. For more information on the scholarship, go to www.nea.org/retired/programs/awards-kinnaman.html. Students interested in the scholarship can also find application guidelines here. This year's deadline to apply is April 15, 2005.



## Travel Safety Tips for Youth

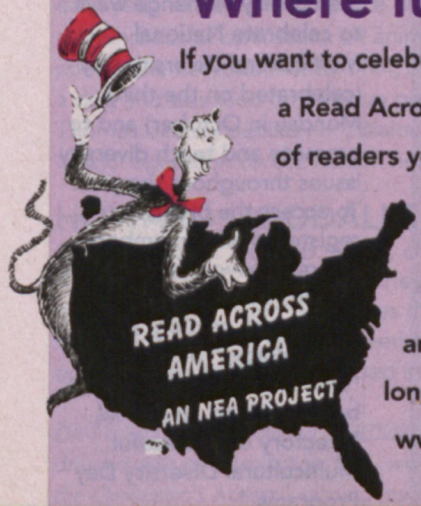
Teachers, parents, and students can obtain a free brochure, "Travel Safety Tips: For Students, Youth and College Age Travelers," from the Student and Youth Travel Association of North America (SYTA), a non-profit, professional travel trade association.

The brochure focuses on the unique travel needs and challenges faced by young people traveling in groups or on their own. A special section, "Questions Parents Should Ask," advises parents on what to discuss with the travel provider before their children depart. The brochure is available for free by calling 800-509-7982. It can also be downloaded from the SYTA Web site at www.syta.org.

## Psychiatrists Who Work in Schools

The Directory of Psychiatrists Who Work in Schools has been updated and can be found on the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Web site, at www.psych.org, under "Public Information" and then "Families and Children." More than 280 psychiatrists have agreed to be listed in this guide for finding names and locations of doctors who work with schools. If you have questions or comments, please contact kids@psych.org or write to the Office of Children's Affairs, APA, 1000 Wilson Blvd., Suite 1825, Arlington, VA 22209.

## Read Across America is 'Where it's Hat!'




**If you want to celebrate the joy of reading, chances are there's a Read Across America celebration near you as millions of readers young and old gather together for NEA's Read Across America day, March 2. But don't stop there! Read Across America has plenty of resources for your classroom and community to keep kids reading all year long. Sign up for the RAA newsletter at www.nea.org/readacross and you'll find reading news, activities, and resources.**

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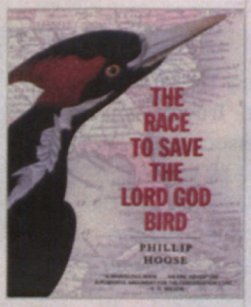
# In Print

## FELIZ CUMPLEAÑOS

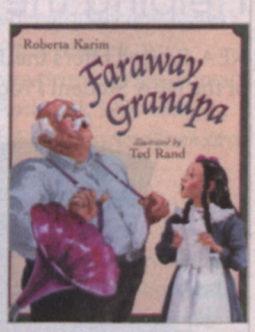
Welcome to the lively Miami barrio where Chavi and her friend Rosario are intent on making Lazarita's dreams of a 15th birthday party come true, even though her father has lost his job. Mayra L. Dole's colorful bilingual book *Birthday in the Barrio/ Cumpleaños en el Barrio* tells the story of Chavi and Rosario's scheme to put on a party that won't cost Lazarita's family anything, while at the same time helping out the nearby homeless shelter. 32 pp. $16.95 from Children's Book Press. To order, visit www.childrensbookpress.org.

## EXPLORING EXTINCTION



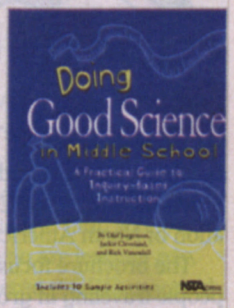

*The Race to Save the Lord God Bird* is Phillip Hoose's mesmerizing, well-researched narration of the ivory-billed woodpecker's disappearance, one of the first big conservation showdowns. The book explores our changing attitudes surrounding species and habitat protection and pays tribute to a legendary animal as well as the human spirit. 196 pp. $20 from Melanie Kroupa Books. To order, visit www.fsgkidsbooks.com.

## GRANDPA'S MEMORY




Every year, Kathleen makes the trip to visit her "faraway" Grandpa Danny. But recently, Grandpa has started forgetting things, such as the letters he usually writes to her. Grandpa eventually comes to live with Kathleen and her parents when his memory worsens. In the gentle *Faraway Grandpa,* author Roberta Karim covers a difficult subject with lots of heart, telling how Kathleen still finds ways to have fun with her grandpa despite his deteriorating memory. 33 pp. $16.95 from Henry Holt. To order, visit www.henryholt.com or call 888-330-8477.

## MAKING SCIENCE CLASS COUNT




If your middle school students seem disengaged from the common textbook approach to science, Olaf Jorgenson, Jackie Cleveland, and Rick Vanosdall's *Doing Good Science in Middle School: A Practical Guide to Inquiry-Based Instruction* may be just what you need. Put together by experienced educators, this guide is packed with strategies for reaching all students and ideas for presenting curriculum, all centered around 10 core activities 133 pp. $24.95 from National Science Teachers Association Press. To order, visit http://store.nsta.org or call 800-277-5300.

# What's Up at HIN

NEA·HIN

## BREATHE EASIER AT HOME, SCHOOL, AND AT PLAY

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) studies show that indoor levels of pollutants may be two to five times higher than outdoor levels. To help improve indoor air quality, the Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics (AANMA) worked with EPA to develop the Indoor AIRepair at Home, School, and Play (HSP) program. HSP takes school personnel on self-guided building inspections and provides low- and no-cost solutions to common indoor air quality problems. Order your free kit today by calling 800-878-4403.

## HELPING STUDENTS WITH DIABETES SUCCEED

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic diseases in school-age children, affecting about 206,000 young people in 2002. The National Diabetes Education Program offers a new publication, *Helping the Student with Diabetes Succeed: A Guide for School Personnel.* Part of the Diabetes in School Initiative, jointly sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the guide includes practices for schools to follow to effectively help students manage diabetes in a safe learning environment. For copies, call 800-438-5383 or go to www.ndep.nih.gov/resources/school.htm.

## SCHOOL FACILITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT—FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) recently published *Schoolhouse in the Red,* which focuses on improving children's health by improving the school facility environment. Although written for school administrators, it has broader applicability. The book includes a discussion about the link between asthma and poor indoor air quality in schools and compares the costs associated with deteriorating buildings. Copies are available for $12 each by contacting Ericka Turner at eturner@aasa.org.

## SHARE TIPS TO CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

As part of NEA's new Web site, nea.org has launched an electronic bulletin board where educators can share their ideas and successes for teaching diversity. The board will help educators around the country exchange ways to celebrate National Multicultural Diversity Day (celebrated on the third Monday in October) and to promote and teach diversity issues throughout the year. To access the board, registered NEA members can go to www.nea.org, click on the "Members & Educators" section, select "NEA Voices" and then "Discussion Boards." The board is titled "National Directory of Successful Multicultural Diversity Day Programs."

# On TV

## THE BROOKE ELLISON STORY

*A&E, March 7–8, 7 a.m., ET.*
Christopher Reeve directed this two-part 2004 film based on the life of a young quadriplegic woman who, with her mother's help, graduated from Harvard University. The hourlong show can be taped and used in the classroom for two years.

## WOMEN COMBAT PILOTS: THE RIGHT STUFF

*History Channel, March 10, 6 a.m., ET.*
This show looks at the struggles, accomplishments, and contributions of female pilots, from the Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs) of WWII to today's top guns. Can be taped and used in the classroom for two years.

## MOTHERS OF INVENTION

*History Channel, March 11, 6 a.m., ET.*
A presentation of the history of women inventors with a look at the advances women are making today. Can be taped and used in the classroom for two years.

## PARTNERS OF THE HEART

*PBS, March 21, 9 p.m., ET, check local listings.*

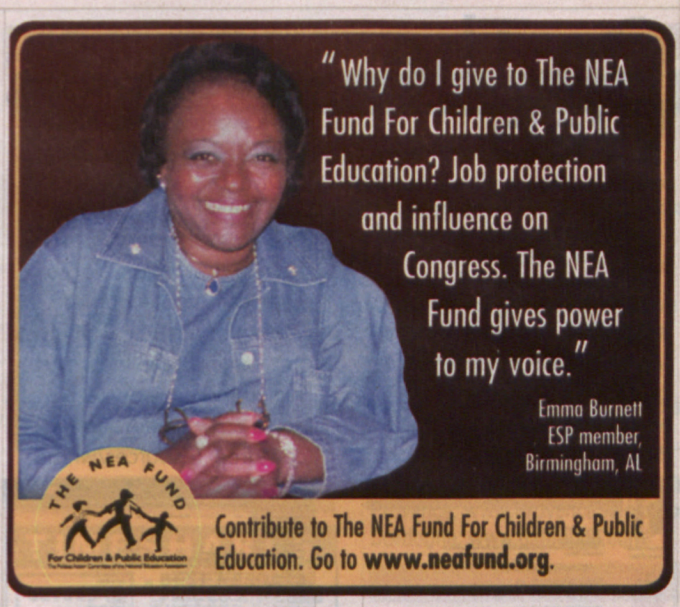
Some of the best surgeons of the 1940s and 1950s were trained at Johns Hopkins Medical School by a Black man with a high school education. Alfred Blalock, a white surgeon, met Vivien Thomas, then a Black janitor in a research lab, and hired him as an assistant when he took a job at Johns Hopkins. Despite facing discrimination, Blalock and Thomas together researched the "blue baby" heart condition, which was a fatal defect in thousands of children born each year. While Blalock ran the department, Thomas conducted hundreds of operations on animals to perfect a technique to correct the heart defect. By 1944, the technique had worked in a dog and was tried on a young girl close to death. With Thomas directly behind him, Blalock performed the first successful operation on the human heart.

## HOWARD GOODALL'S BIG BANGS

*Ovation, March 22, 12 p.m., ET, check local listings.*
As part of a series that reviews the history of music, "The Invention of the Piano" examines the origin of the piano and the contributions of Mozart, Beethoven, and Haydn to its development. Can be taped and used in the classroom for one year.

*On TV listings are provided by KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., www.kidsnet.org, and by Cable in the Classroom's* Access Learning *magazine at www.ciconline.org.*

PHOTOS TOP: HULTGREEN FAMILY; BOTTOM: PHOTO COURTESY OF CLARA THOMAS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## DIVERSITY CALENDAR

### MARCH

**MARCH 1–31—WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH**
The month proclaimed by Congress to celebrate the achievements of women and their inspiring contributions to our country.

**MARCH 1–31—IRISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH**
By presidential proclamation, this month is also set aside to recognize the contributions of the Irish and Irish Americans to the history and culture of the United States.

**MARCH 21—BAHÁ'Í NEW YEAR'S DAY**
Called Naw-Rúz, this holy day starts at sunset the evening before, and work and school are suspended for Bahá'ís.

**MARCH 27—EASTER**
Christians celebrate Christ's resurrection on this day, which is observed the first Sunday following the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox.

### APRIL

**APRIL 2—INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S BOOK DAY**
Celebrated on author Hans Christian Andersen's birthday, this event helps children develop understanding of other cultures through literature. For more, go to www.usbby.org.

**APRIL 6—FOUNDING OF THE MORMON CHURCH**
On this day in 1830, Joseph C. Smith and Oliver Cowdery founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

**APRIL 17–23—PUBLIC SCHOOL VOLUNTEER WEEK**
Project Appleseed sponsors this week to encourage parents and citizens to volunteer in their public schools. Go to www.projectappleseed.org.

**APRIL 24–25—PASSOVER**
This Jewish festival, which begins at sunset on April 23, commemorates the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt.

# On The Web

### WOMEN CHANGE AMERICA

"Women Change America," is the 2005 Women's History Month theme. Find ways to celebrate the theme at the National Women's History Project site at www.nwhp.org.

"The Learning Place" section lists biographies, classroom activities, and other resources, some available for purchase.

### WOMEN IN HISTORY

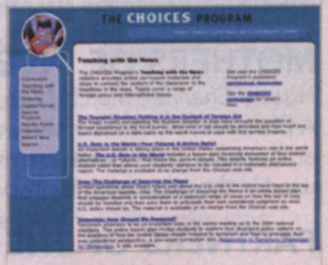
Find ideas to celebrate Women's History Month at this site that offers biographies of notable women, classroom activities, history quizzes and timelines, and links to more history resources. Go to www.galegroup.com/free_resources/whm/.

### TOUR THE WHITE HOUSE

Get inside the White House with a visit to this White House Historical Association site. Here you can find lessons for K–12 students, primary documents, and hundreds of images of the White House and its occupants. Also available are a limited number of kits on the White House for educators to use as a teaching tool. Go to www.whitehousehistory.org. E-mail edu@whha.org to request that a kit be sent to your school address.

### FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CLASSROOM

Students should have an idea of international current events, and resources designed to help teachers put foreign policy into the classroom are now just a click away. Teaching with the News, developed by the Choices Program at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies, provides teachers with background and lesson plans for teaching international issues. Go to www.choices.edu/curriculum_twtn.cfm.




### MATH IN THE REAL WORLD

Designing and building a scale model house shows students how math is used in the real world. For those interested in the activity, www.homeplanner.com offers illustrations and worksheets to help students get started. Three PDF files that can be downloaded from the "Form + Function" section under "Design Details" contain sample problems, including how to determine the minimum window area of a room or the amount of floor covering needed, as well as a printable isometric grid pattern sheet.

## BOOKS BY NEA MEMBERS

### A WINNER BY ANY STANDARD: A PERSONAL GROWTH JOURNEY FOR EVERY AMERICAN TEEN

**By Rob Garofalo, Jr.**

This life manual gives teens 52 personal growth challenges—one for each week—designed to help them realize they have the power to shape themselves, their future, and the world. Written by a state Teacher of the Year, the book speaks plainly about everyday issues such as gossip, money, friendship, and image. Each challenge ends with a practical "Life App"(application) section, to help teens fulfill their potential and succeed. The book can be used for facilitating classroom discussion and inspiring students. 244 pp. $16.95 from Teen Winners Publishing. To order, go to www.teen-winners.com or call 860-829-2067.

### THE PROJECT ACES HANDBOOK: 15 GREAT PROJECTS FOR MAKING FITNESS FUN!

**By Len Saunders**

Motivate students preK–12 to exercise with this health and fitness book written by a veteran physical education teacher. Each chapter is dedicated to organizing and promoting a community- or school-wide program that enhances kids' fitness skills. Exercises; program outlines; reproducible letters to the media, parents, and staff; certificates; organizational checklists; and descriptions of how to arrange successful events at your facility are included to help you plan and promote projects. 182 pp. $24.95 from Great Activities Publishing Company. To order go to www.projectaces.com.

### QUICK AND EASY WAYS TO CONNECT WITH STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS, GRADES K–8

**By Diane Mierzwik**

This guidebook, written by a veteran teacher and geared for both beginning and experienced educators, provides classroom-tested methods for building relationships with students and their parents. Filled with sample forms, documents, and letters that teachers can adapt for their own use, the book includes information on motivating difficult students, preparing for back-to-school nights, reaching out to uninvolved parents, and facilitating constructive parent-teacher conferences. 136 pp. $27.95 from Corwin Press. To order, go to www.corwin-press.com.

## BILINGUAL EDUCATION

**LOUIE LLAMA'S** English-Spanish READER, GRADES 2-7, http://www.SUPERAMERICANS.COM.

## BOARD CERTIFICATION

Members who are seeking **National Board Certification** can apply for an affordable loan designed to help cover the $2,300 assessment fee. The NEA National Board Certification Loan® is a special line of credit that has no application fee, no annual fee, no prepayment penalty, and no collateral is required. For more information or to apply, call 1-800-545-4094, Monday – Thursday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., Friday 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (or Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) ET.

## HOME EQUITY

**Home Equity Loans for NEA Members**

If you're a homeowner, you can use a tax-deductible home equity loan to pay for home improvement projects, pay off high-interest debt, buy a car, or pay college tuition. For more information on home equity loans for NEA members, call the NEA Home Financing Program® at 1-800-NEA-4-YOU (1-800-632-4968) and "press 3" for a no-obligation consultation.

## INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS

**Rhythm, Rhyme, and Repetition** is a FUN way to meet the reading needs of ALL students. (K-1st) http://www.whoisinmyhouse.com.

## PLATINUM PLUS CREDIT

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## SEMINAR

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25 East 21st Street
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web: www.jewishlabor.org
**Application Deadline:**
*April 1, 2005*

***July 6—27, 2005***

Three-week seminar for secondary school teachers able to implement Holocaust studies in their classrooms. Program includes Poland, the Czech Republic, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. With prominent scholars from Israel's Yad Vashem Center and Ghetto Fighters' House. Teachers pay $2,000, which includes round-trip travel, trips to historic sites, hotels, two to a room, and two meals daily.

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# No More Carrots

## Gold stars, grades, and pizza parties sap the love of learning.

BY JOHN PERRICONE

"HEY GUYS, WOULD YOU GIVE me a hand moving these desks?"

"Sure, Mr. Perricone. What's in it for us?"

"What do you mean?" I ask, somewhat dejected.

"You know, maybe some extra credit?"

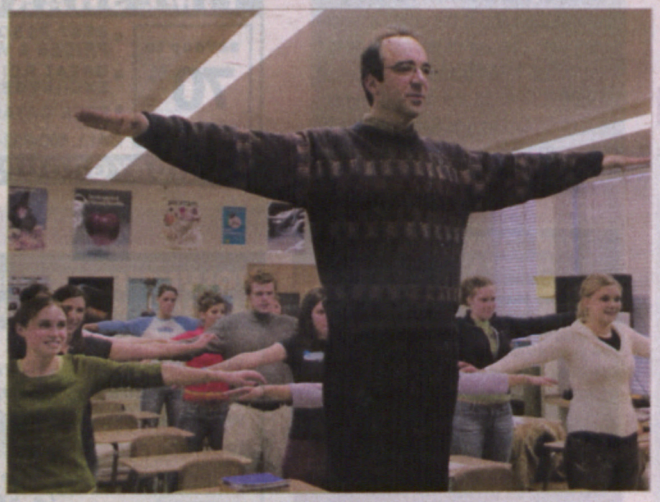
I stare at them in disbelief. They sense my discomfort, and the issue is dropped as they scurry to help me with the desks.

As an educator and as a parent, I have grave concerns about the mindset of many of our young people—What will you give me? It's a mindset I believe my own profession and many parents are largely responsible for because we use external rewards (pizza parties, candy, etc.) to motivate (bribe) our students and children to read, perform, and behave.

At least two dozen studies clearly suggest that these practices are counterproductive. In one typical study, children were introduced to an unfamiliar beverage called Kefir. Some were just asked to drink; others were praised lavishly for doing so; a third group was promised treats if the students drank enough. Those who received verbal or tangible rewards consumed more than the other children, as one might predict. But a week later, the praised and rewarded children found Kefir significantly less appealing than they did before, whereas those who were offered no rewards liked it just as much as they had earlier. If we substitute reading, or doing math, or acting generously for drinking Kefir, we begin to glimpse the destructive nature of extrinsic reward systems.

Do rewards motivate students? Absolutely. They motivate students to get rewards. They do not motivate children to learn.

Educator Alfie Kohn argues that when someone says, "Do this and you will get that," it automatically devalues "this." The recipient of the reward figures that if they have to be bribed, "this" must be something they wouldn't want to do for its own sake. How can we send such a sad message about learning to our kids? Our message to children should be that the reward for reading a great book is a story that inspires or moves them, not coupons to Pizza Hut or M&M's. Our children are not trained seals.



Flying lessons? No, it's **John Perricone's** intro to a lesson on peer pressure: Which rows can hold their arms up the longest? (No gold stars for winning.)

Certainly not everything worth learning in life is fun and exciting. I don't remember being thrilled learning my times tables, but man, am I glad I did. But I believe every teacher, within their subject matter, should be able to answer their students' question, "Of what value is this to my life?" with an answer more meaningful and profound than "It's on the exam!"

I tell my students from the first day that I wish I did not have to give grades, but the system requires that I do. I tell them I see their grades as simply indicators of progress, like road signs on a trip, not ends in themselves.

I ask them: Why are you getting an education? (Typical response: to get a good job.) And why do you want a good job? (So I can make money.) And why do you want money? (So I can live.) And what do you live for? (Silence.) And so begins our discussion about how education can be a tool for living a meaningful and fulfilled life.

I recognize that we live in a capitalistic world, and money keeps it spinning. But making money doesn't have to be a person's only focus in life—otherwise, there would be no teachers! It's no secret that many people who have high-paying jobs are miserable.

I ask myself as I'm planning each lesson, "If I were a student listening to this, would I find it interesting and meaningful to my life?" If the answer is "no," I start over until the answer is "yes."

And if any student ever feels compelled to ask, "Mr. Perricone, what do we get if we win this competition on nutrients today?" I simply answer, "What do you get? You get smarter."

**"Our message to children should be that the reward for reading a great book is a story that inspires or moves them, not coupons to Pizza Hut or M&M's."**

**John Perricone** has been a high school health educator in Endwell, New York, for 21 years and has received seven consecutive Distinguished Teacher Awards presented by the senior class. His book, *Zen and the Art of Public School Teaching* will be out soon. Visit him at www.JohnPerricone.com.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**
Share your own thoughts at

**WWW.NEA.ORG/NEATODAYEXTRA**

PHOTO: JON REIS

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**Don't let your savings suffer from low yields – open an NEA-sponsored deposit account today.**
**Call MBNA at 1.800.457.2258 and mention priority code JA0HK**
**or visit www.neamb.com/deposits**

*NEA-Sponsored CD Annual Percentage Yields (APYs) for terms shown are valid 1/31/05-2/6/05, based on a $1,000 minimum opening balance, 365 day calendar year and assume that interest remains in the account until maturity. Penalty may be imposed for early withdrawal of CD principal. Withdrawals and fees may reduce earnings.

**All other bank APYs shown in the comparison chart are valid as of 1/26/05, based on balances of $1,000 and terms shown. Source – *Market Rates Insight*, 1/26/05. Rates shown are for comparison purposes only.

†For the NEA-Sponsored Money Market Account, the minimum opening balance to obtain the Annual Percentage Yield (APY) is $500. The current APYs with the bonus are: for balances of $500 to $49,999–2.11%, for balances of $50,000 or more –2.37%. The APYs are based on a bonus rate of 1% for the first 60 days with a limit of one bonus period per member. The current APYs without the bonus are: for balances of $500 to $49,999–1.94%, for balances of $50,000 or more–2.20%. For balances below $500 the bonus is not applicable and the APY is 1.44%. The APYs are valid 1/31/05-2/6/05. The yields may change after the account is opened. Fees could reduce earnings on the account.

††Eligible NEA family members include parents, spouse (or domestic partner) and children.

The NEA-Sponsored CD and NEA-Sponsored Money Market Account have been developed for NEA members and their families only. If a member decides not to renew membership, that person and his/her family will no longer be eligible to receive the preferred rates and fees offered through the NEA-Sponsored CD program or NEA-Sponsored Money Market Account. If eligible, a replacement account will be offered.

The certificate of deposit and money market accounts are offered through MBNA America Bank, N.A., PO Box 15322, Wilmington, DE 19850-5322.

FDIC-insured up to $100,000 per depositor.

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**Absolutely NO membership dues are used to market this program.**

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